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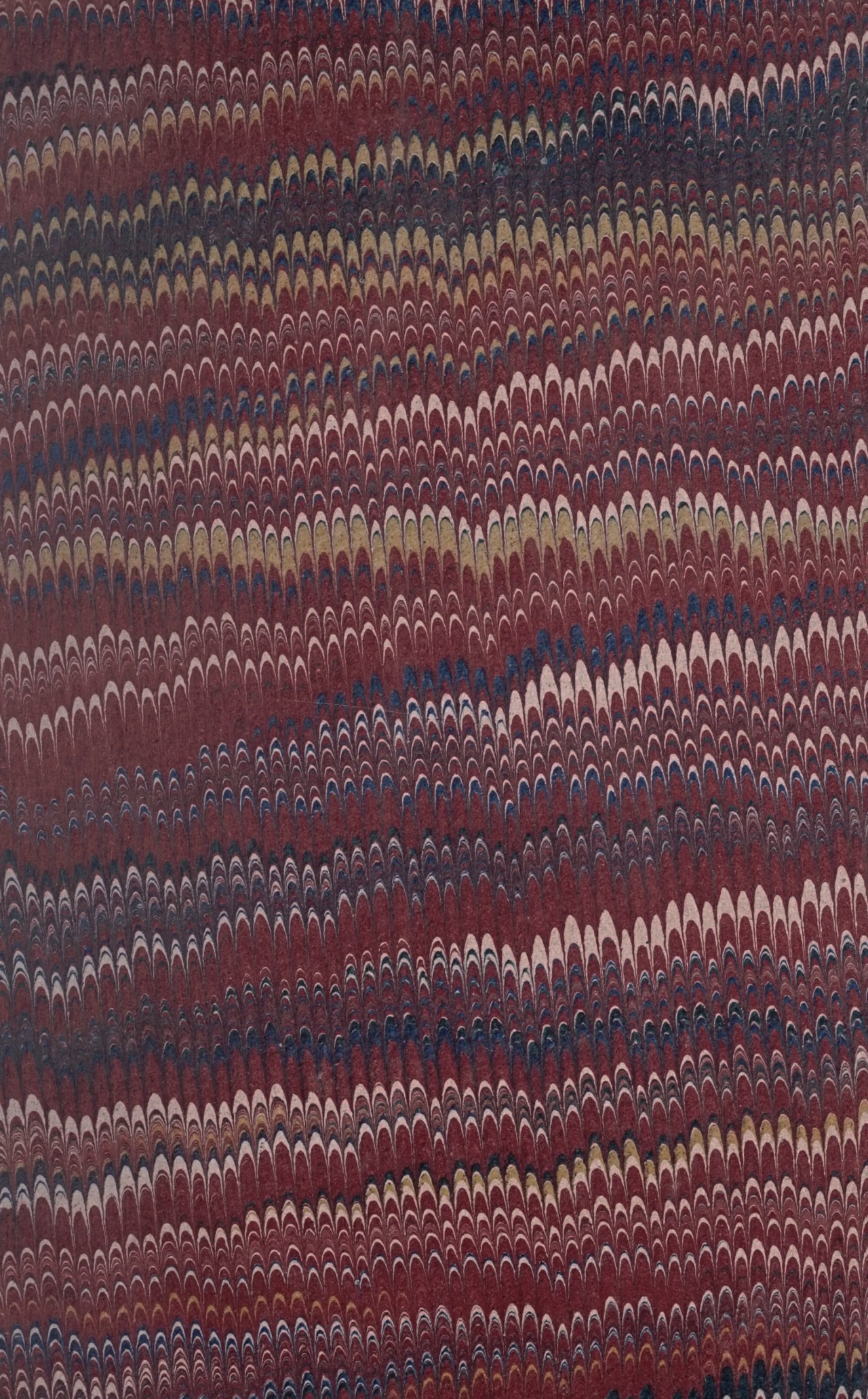

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THE Seaside Library

Pocket Edition.

THE MYSTERY OF JESSY PAGE,

AND OTHER TALES.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

17 TO 27 VANDEWATER ST
NEW YORK

George Munro
PUBLISHER

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THE MYSTERY OF JESSY PAGE

AND OTHER TALES.

i.e. Ellen Price

By MRS. HENRY WOOD.

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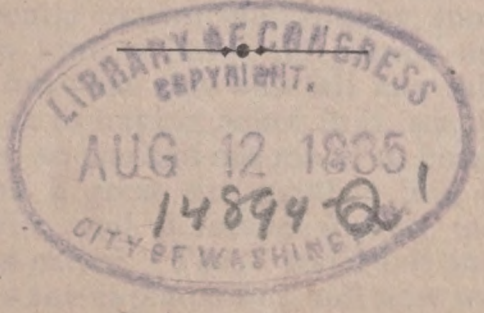
Seaside

God sent his Singers upon earth
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to heaven again.

LONGFELLOW.



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1885

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THE MYSTERY OF JESSY PAGE.

PART THE FIRST.

THE DISAPPEARANCE.

You may think this a curious title, but the history is a perfectly true one. The affair occurred in our neighborhood many years ago; people spoke of it at the time as "The Mystery of Jessy Page," and they so speak of it to this day.

It can hardly be necessary to recall to your recollection certain particulars connected with these stories. But, to do so briefly, I here repeat the few words of explanation given when the last volumes were published. Mr. Todhetley, commonly called the squire, had two estates. The chief one, Dyke Manor, lay on the borders of Worcestershire and Warwickshire, partly in both counties; the other, Crabb Cot, was a smaller place altogether, and lay much nearer Worcester. Sometimes we stayed at one place, sometimes at the other. By an arrangement with Mr. Brandon, my guardian and the trustee to my property, I, Johnny Ludlow, lived with the Todhetleys. Mrs. Todhetley, the squire's second wife, was my step-mother, my father—William Ludlow of the Court—having married her after my own mother's death. After my father's death, which took place speedily, she became the wife of Squire Todhetley, and the step-mother of his only son and heir, Joseph. Two children were subsequently born, Hugh and Lena, to whom Joseph was of course the half-brother. Joseph, unlike myself, had been old enough to resent the advent of a step-mother when she came: indulged and haughty he did not like the gentle control she brought; though she was good as gold, as loving to him as he would permit, and kind to everybody. I don't say but that she was tall and thin as a lamp-post, with a mild face given to having aches in it, scanty, fine, light hair, and kindly blue eyes; so she had not much to boast of in the way of appearance. Joe and I grew up together like brothers: he was several years the elder and domineered over me absolutely. At school he was always called "Tod," and I fell into the same habit. This much comprises the explanation: and now we will go on to the first story, "The Mystery of Jessy Page."

Our old gray church at Church Dykely stood in a solitary spot. Servant-maids (two of ours once, Hannah and Molly), and silly village girls went there sometimes to watch for the "shadows" on St. Mark's Eve, and owls had a habit of dashing out of the belfry

at night. Within view of the church, though at some distance from it, stood the lonely, red brick, angular dwelling house belonging to Copse Farm. It was inhabited by Mr. Page, a plain worthy widower, getting in years; his three daughters and little son. Abigail and Susan Page, two experienced, sensible, industrious young women, with sallow faces and bunches of short dark curls, were at this period, nearly midway between twenty and thirty: Jessy, very much younger, was gone out to get two years' "finishing" at a plain boarding-school; Charles, the lad, had poor health, and went to school by day at Church Dykely.

Mr. Page fell ill. He would never be able to get about much again. His two daughters, so far as in-door work and management went, were hosts in themselves, Miss Abigail especially; but they could not mount a horse to superintend out of doors. Other arrangements were made. The second son of Mr. Drench, a neighboring farmer and friend, came to the Copse Farm by day as overlooker. He was paid for his services, and he gained experience.

No sooner had John Drench, a silent, bashful young farmer, well-looking and fairly-well educated, been installed in his new post, than he began to show a decided admiration for Miss Susan Page—who was a few months younger than himself. The slight advances he made were favorably received; and it was tacitly looked upon that they were "as good as engaged." Things went on pleasantly all the spring, and might have continued so to go on, but for the coming home at midsummer of the youngest daughter, Jessy. That led to no end of cross-grained contrariety.

She was the sweetest flower you ever saw; a fair, delicate lily, with a mild countenance, blue eyes, and hair of a golden tinge. Jessy has never been very strong; she had always been very pretty; and the consequence was that while her sisters had grown up to be useful, not to be a minute idle throughout the long day, Jessy had been petted and indulged, and was not much except ornamental. The two years' schooling had not improved her taste for domestic occupation. To tell the truth, Jessy was given to be uncommonly idle.

To John Drench, who had not seen her since her early girlhood, she appeared as a vision of beauty. "It was like an angel coming in at the door," he said of the day she first came home, when telling the tale to a stranger in after years. "My eyes were fairly dazzled."

Like an angel! And unfortunately for John Drench, his heart was dazzled as well as his eyes. He fell desperately in love with her. It taught him that what he had felt for Miss Susan was not love at all; only esteem, and the liking that so often arises from companionship. He was well-meaning, but inexperienced. As he had never spoken to Susan, the utmost sign he had given being a look or a warmer hand-shake than usual, he thought there would be no difficulty in transferring his homage to the younger sister. Susan Page, who really loved him, and perhaps looked on with the keen eyes of jealousy, grew at last to see how matters were. She would have liked to put him in a corn-sack and give him a good shaking by way of cure. Thus the summer months went over in some silent discomfort, and September came in warm and fine.

Jessy Page stood at the open parlor window in her airy summer

muslin, twirling a rose in her hand, blue ribbons falling from her hair: for Jessy liked to set herself off in little adornments. She was laughing at John Drench outside, who had appeared covered with mud from the pond, into which he had contrived partially to slip when they were dragging for eels.

"I think your picture ought to be taken, just as you look now, Mr. John."

He thought *hers* ought: the bright fair face, the laughing blue eyes, the parted lips and the pretty white teeth presented a picture that, to him, had never had its equal. He could not answer at first for looking at her.

"Do you, Miss Jessy? That's a fine rose," he shyly added. He was always shy with her.

She held it out. She had not the least objection to be admired, even by John Drench in a state of mud. In their hearts, women have all hankered after men's flattery from Eve downward.

"These large roses are the sweetest of any," she went on. "I plucked it from the tree beyond the grass-plat."

"You are fond of flowers, I've noticed, Miss Jessy."

"Yes, that I am. Both for themselves and for the language they symbolize."

"What language is it?"

"Don't *you* know? I learnt it at school. Each flower possesses its own meaning, Mr. John Drench. This, the rose, is true love."

"True love, is it, Miss Jessy?"

She was lightly flirting it right before his face. It was too much for him, and he took it gently from her. "Will you give it me?" he asked below his breath.

"Oh, with great pleasure." And then she lightly added, as if to damp the eager look on his face: "There are plenty more on the same tree."

"An emblem of true love," he softly repeated. "It's a pretty thought. I wonder who invented—"

"Now then, John Drench, do you know that tea's waiting. Are you going to sit down in those muddy boots and leggings?"

The sharp words came from Susan Page. Jessy turned and saw her sister's pale, angry face. John Drench disappeared, and Miss Susan went out again, and banged the door.

"It is high time Jessy was put to some regular employment," cried Susan, bursting into the room where Miss Page sat making the tea. "She idles away her time in the most frivolous and wasteful manner, never doing an earthly thing. It is sinful."

"So it is," acquiesced Miss Page. "Have you a headache, Susan? You look pale."

"Never mind my looks," said wrathful Susan. "We will portion out some share of work for her from to-day. She might make up the butter, and undertake the pies and puddings, and do the plain sewing."

William Page, a gray-haired man, sitting with a stick by his side, looked up. "Pretty creature!" he said, for he fondly loved his youngest daughter. "I'll not have her hard-worked, Susan."

"But you'd not have her sit with her hands before her from Mon-

day morning till Saturday night, I suppose, father!" sharply returned Miss Susan. "She'll soon be nineteen."

"No, no; idleness brings naught but evil in its train. I didn't mean that, Susan. Let the child do what is suitable for her. Where's John Drench?"

"*He* is in a fine mess—up to his middle in mud," was Miss Susan's tart answer. "One would think he had been trying to see how great an object he could make of himself."

John Drench came in, somewhat cleansed, his coat changed and the rose in his button-hole. He took his seat at the tea-table and was more shy and silent than ever. Jessy sat by her father, chattering gayly, her blue ribbons flickering before his loving eyes. Once he caught hold of an end of the shining silk, and held it for a moment to his lips.

But the butter-making and the other light work was fated not to be inaugurated yet for Jessy. Charles Page, a tiresome, indulged lad of twelve, became ill again: he was subject to attacks of low fever and ague. Mr. Duffham, peering at the boy over his gold headed cane, said there was nothing for it but a dose of good sea-side air. Mr. Page, anxious for his boy, began to consult with his daughters as to how it might be obtained. They had some very distant connections named Allen, living at Aberyst with. To them Miss Page wrote, asking if they could take in Charles and one of his sisters to board for a month or so. Mrs. Allen replied that she would be glad to have them; since her husband's death she had eked out a scanty income by letting lodgings.

It was Jessy who went with him. The house and farm could not have spared Abigail; Susan said neither should it spare her. The idle and useless one had to go—Jessy. Miss Susan thought she and John Drench were well rid of the young lady.

September was in its second week when they went; November was at its close when they returned. The improvement in Charles had been so marked and wonderful—as Mrs. Allen and Jessy both wrote to say—that Mr. Duffham had strongly urged his staying as long as the weather remained favorable. It was a remarkably fine late autumn that year, and they stayed till November's close.

Charles came home well and strong. Jessy was more beautiful than ever; radiant to behold. But there was some change in her. The light-hearted, talking, laughing girl had grown rather silent; she was often singing snatches of love songs to herself in a low voice, and there was a light in her eyes, as of some intense, secret happiness that might not be told. John Drench, who had begun to show signs of returning to his old allegiance (at least, Miss Susan so flattered herself), fell a willing captive again forthwith, and had certainly neither eyes nor ears for anybody but Jessy. Susan Page came to the conclusion that a shaking in a sack would be far too good for him.

* * * * * * *

The way of dressing the churches for Christmas is those past days was quite different from the new style of "decoration" obtaining now. Sprays of holly with their red berries, of ivy with its brown clusters, were stuck, each alternately, into the holes on the top of the pews. It was a better way than the present, far more effective—

though I, Johnny Ludlow, shall be no doubt laughed at for saying it. Your woven wreaths tied round the pulpit and reading-desk; your lettered scrolls, made of white wadding gummed on pink or crimson ground and plastered against the walls; your artificial flowers, yellow, blue, salmon, I know not how many colors, may be talked of as "artistic," but for effect they all stand absolutely as nothing, in comparison with the more simple and natural way, and they are, perhaps, the least bit tawdry. If you don't believe me, pay a visit to some rural church next Christmas morning—for the old fashion is observed in many a country district still—and judge for yourselves. Upon entering, you seem to pass into a bright atmosphere; a wide arena of cheery evergreens, symbolical of the day. Like many another custom that has been changed by the folly and fashion of these later days of pretension, and not changed for the better, lies this one. That is my opinion, and I hold to it.

The dressing in our church was always done by the clerk, old Bumford. The sexton (called familiarly with us the grave-digger) helped him when his health allowed, but he was nearly always ill, and then Bumford himself had to be grave-digger. It was not much trouble, this manner of decoration, and it took very little time. They had only to cut off the sprays nearly of the same size, smooth the ends, and lodge them in the holes. In the last century when a new country church was rebuilt (though it did not happen often), the drilling of these holes in the woodwork of the pews, for the reception of the "Christmas," was as much a matter of course as were the pews themselves. Our Christmas was supplied by Mr. Page with a liberal hand; the Copse Farm abounded with trees of holly and ivy; one of his men, Leek, would help Bumford to cut it, and to cart it in a hand-truck to the church. It took a good lot to do all the pews.

On this Christmas that I am telling you of, it fell out that Clerk Bumford and the sexton were disabled. Both of them. Bumford had rheumatic gout so badly that his feet were the size of half a dozen—and getting him into church for the morning service the past three Sundays had been a marvel of dexterity—while the sexton was in bed with what he called catarrh. At first it seemed that we should not get the church dressed at all: but the Miss Pages, ever ready and active in a good work, came to the rescue, and said they would do it themselves, with John Drench's help. The squire was not going to be behind-hand, and said we boys, for Tod and I were just home for the holidays, should help too.

And when Christmas Eve came, and Leek had wheeled up the holly, and we were all in the cold church (not I think that any of us cared whether it was cold or warm), we enjoyed the work amazingly, and decided that old Bumford should never be let do it again, gout or no gout.

Jessy Page was a picture. The two elder ladies had on tight dark cloth dresses, like a riding-habit cut short at the ankles: Jessy was in a bright blue mantle edged with swan's-down, and a blue bonnet on her pretty hair. She came in a little late, and Miss Susan sharply blew her up for putting on that "best Sunday cape" to dress a church in: but Jessy only laughed good-naturedly, and answered that she would take care not to harm it. Susan Page, trimming

the branches, had seen John Drench's eyes fixed on the girl: and her knife worked away like mad in her vexation.

"Look here," said Jessy: "we have never had any Christmas over the pulpit; I think old Bumford was afraid to get up to do it; let us put some. It would hide that ugly nail in the wall."

"There are no holes up in the wall," snapped Miss Susan.

"I meant a large bunch; a bunch of holly and ivy mixed, Susan. John Drench could tie it to the nail: it would look beautiful."

"I'll do it, too," said John. "I've some string in my pocket. The parson won't know himself. 'Twill be as good as a canopy over him."

Miss Page turned round: she and Charley had their arms full of the branches we had been cutting.

"Put a bunch there, if you like, but let us finish the pews first," she said. "If we go from one thing to another we shall not finish while it's daylight."

It was plain good sense: she rarely spoke anything else. Once let darkness overtake us, and the dressing would be done for. The church knew nothing about evening service, and had never felt the want of means to light itself up.

"I shall pick out the best sprays in readiness," whispered Jessy to me, as we sat together on the bench by the big christening bowl, she choosing branches, I trimming them and cutting the ends level. "Look at this one! you could not count the berries on it."

"Did you enjoy your visit to Aberystwith, Jessy?"

I wondered what there was in my simple question to move her. The branch of holly went anywhere; her hands met in a silent clasp; the expression of her face changed to one of curious happiness. In answering, her voice fell to a whisper.

"Yes, I enjoyed it."

"What a long time you stayed! An age, Mrs. Todhetley says."

"It was nearly eleven weeks."

"Eleven weeks! How tedious!"

Her face was glowing, her eyes had a sweet light in them. She caught up some holly, and began scattering its berries.

"What did you do with yourself, Jessy?"

"I used to sit by the sea—and to walk about. It was very fine. They don't have it like that in November, Mrs. Allen said."

"Did Mrs. Allen sit and walk with you?"

"No. She had enough to do with the house and her lodgers. We only saw her at meal times."

"The Miss Allens, perhaps?"

"There are no Miss Allens. Only one little boy."

"Why, then, you had no one but Charley!"

"Charley? Oh, he used to be always about with little Tom Allen —in a boat, or something of that sort. Mrs. Allen thought the sea breezes must be so good for him."

"Well, you must have been dull!"

Jessy looked rather foolish. She was a simple-minded girl at the best. The two elder sisters had all the strong sense of the family, she the simplicity. Some people called Jessy Page "soft;" perhaps, as contrasted with her sisters, she was so: and she was very inexperienced.

The dusk was gathering, and Charley had gone out tired, when John Drench got into the pulpit to tie the bunch of holly to the wall above it. Tod was with him. Drench had his hands stretched out, and we stood watching them in a group in the aisle below, when the porch door was burst open, and in leaped Charles.

"Jessy! I say! Where's Jessy?"

"I am here," said Jessy, looking round. "What do you want?"

"Here's Mr. Marcus Allen."

Who Mr. Marcus Allen might be, Charles did not say. Jessy knew: there was no doubt of that. Her face, just then close to mine, had flushed as red as a rose in June.

A tall, dark, imposing man came looming out of the dusk. His handsome, furred great coat was open, his waistcoat was of crimson velvet; he wore two chains, three rings, and an eyeglass. And I'll leave you to judge of the effect this vision of grandeur made, dropping down on us plain church-dressers in our every-day clothes. John Drench leaned over the pulpit cushion, string in hand; the two Miss Pages stood staring; Jessy turned white and red with the unexpected amazement. It was to her he approached, and spoke.

"How do you do, Miss Jessy?"

She put her hand out in answer to his; but seemed to have been struck as dumb as the old stone image on the monument against the wall.

"These are your sisters, I presume, Miss Jessy? Will you do me the honor to introduce me to them?"

"Mr. Marcus Allen," murmured Jessy, redder now than any cabbage rose. "My sister Abigail; my sister Susan."

Mr. Marcus Allen, bowing over his hat, said something about the pleasure it gave him to make their acquaintance personally, after hearing so much of them from Miss Jessy at Aberystwith, and begged to be allowed to shake their hands. Miss Page, when the handshaking was over, said in her straightforward way that she did not know who he was, her young sister never having mentioned him. Jessy, standing like a little simpleton, her eyes bent down on the aisle bricks, murmured in confusion that she "forgot it." John Drench had his face over the cushion all that while and Tod's arms began to ache, holding up the bunch of green.

Mr. Marcus Allen, it turned out, was related in some way to the Allens of Aberystwith: he happened to go to the town soon after Jessy Page and her brother went there, and he stayed until they left it. Not at the Allens' house: he had lodgings elsewhere. Mrs. Allen spoke of him to Jessy as a "grand gentleman, quite above them." An idea came over me, as we all now stood together, that he had been Jessy's companion in the walking and the sitting by the sea.

"I told Miss Jessy that I should be running down some day to renew my acquaintanceship with her and make that of her family," said Mr. Marcus Allen to Miss Page. "Having no particular engagement on my hands, this Christmas time, I came."

He spoke in the most easy manner conceivable: his accent and manner were certainly those of a gentleman. As to the fashionable attire and the rings and chains, rather startling though they looked

to us in the dark church on that dark and busy evening, they were all the rage for dandies in the great world then.

Noticing the intimation that he had come purposely to see them, Miss Page supposed that she ought, in hospitably good manners, to invite him to stay a day or two at the farm, but doubted whether so imposing a gentleman would condescend to it. She said nothing about it then, and we all went out of the church together; except John Drench, who stayed behind with Leek to help clear up the litter for the man to carry away. It was light outside, and I took a good look at the stranger, a handsome man of seven-or-eight and-twenty, with hard eyes, and black whiskers curled to perfection.

"In what way is he related to the Allens of Aberystwith, Jessy?" questioned Miss Page, drawing her sister away, as we went through the coppice.

"I don't quite know, Abigail. He is some distant cousin."

"How came you never to speak of him?"

"I—I did not think to."

"Very careless of you, child. Especially if he gave you cause to suppose he might come here. I don't like to be taken by surprise by strangers; it is not always convenient."

Jessy walked along in silence, meek as a lamb.

"What is he?—in any profession, or trade?"

"Trade? Oh, I don't think he does anything of that kind, Abigail. That branch of the family would be above it, Mrs. Allen said. He has a great income, she says; plenty of money."

"I take it, then, that he is above *us*," reasoned Miss Page.

"Oh, dear, yes; in station. Ever so much."

"Then I'm sure I don't care to entertain him."

Miss Page went straight into the best kitchen on arriving at home. Her father sat in the large hearth corner, smoking his pipe. She told him about the stranger, and said she supposed they must ask him to stay over the morrow—Christmas Day.

"Why shouldn't we?" asked Mr. Page.

"Well, father, he seems very grand and great."

"Does he? Give him the best bedroom."

"And our ways are plain, you know," she added.

"He must take us as he finds us, Abigail. Any friend of Mrs. Allen's is welcome; she was downright kind to the children."

We had a jolly tea. Tod and I had been asked to it beforehand. Pork-pies, Miss Susan's make, and hot buttered batch cakes, and lemon cake and jams. Mr. Marcus Allen was charmed with everything; he was a pleasant man to talk to. When we left he and Mr. Page had gone to the best kitchen again, to smoke together in the wide chimney corner.

You Londoners, who go in for your artistic scrolls and crosses should have seen the church on Christmas morning. It burst upon our sight, as we entered from the porch, like a capacious grove of green, on which the sun streamed through the south windows. Old Bumford's dressing had never been as full and handsome as this of ours, for we had rejected all niggardly sprays. The squire even allowed that much. Shaking hands with Miss Page in the porch after service, he told her that it cut Clerk Bumford out and out.

Mr. Marcus Allen, in fashionable coat, with the furred overcoat flung back, light gloves, and big white wristbands, was in Pages' pew, sitting between old Page and Jessy. He found all the places for her in her prayer-book (a shabby red one, some of the leaves loose); bowing slightly every time he handed her the book, as if she had been a princess of the blood royal. Such gallantry was new in our parts; and the congregation were rather taken off their devotions watching it. As to Jessy, she kept flushing like a rose.

Mr. Marcus Allen remained more than a week, staying over New Year's Day. He made himself popular with them all, and enjoyed what Miss Abigail called their plain ways, just as though he had been reared in them. He smoked his pipe in the kitchen with the farmer; he drove Miss Susan to Alcester in the tax-cart; he presented Miss Abigail with a handsome work-box; and gave Charley a bright half-sovereign for bull's-eyes. As to Jessy, he did not take more notice of her than he did of her sisters; hardly as much; so that if Miss Susan had been entertaining any faint hope that his object in coming to the Copse was Jessy, and that in consequence John Drench might escape from bewitching wiles, she found the hope fallacious. Mr. Marcus Allen had apparently no more thought of Jessy than he had of Sally, the red-armed serving-girl. "But what in the world brought the man here at all?" questioned Miss Susan of her sister. "He wanted a bit of country holiday," answered Miss Page with her common sense.

One day during the week the squire met them abroad, and gave an impromptu invitation to the manor for the evening. Only the three Miss Pages came. Mr. Marcus Allen sent his compliments, and begged to be excused on the score of headache.

One evening at dusk we met him and Jessy. She had been out on some errand, and he overtook her in the little coppice path between the church and the farm. Tod, dashing through it to get home for dinner, I after him, nearly dashed right upon them. Marcus Allen had his face inside her bonnet, as if he were speaking in the ear of a deaf old lady of seventy. Tod burst out laughing when we got on.

"That fellow was stealing a sly kiss in the dark, Johnny."

"Like his impudence."

"Rubbish to impudence," retorted Tod. "It's Christmas-tide, and all fair. Didn't you see the bit of mistletoe he was holding up?" And Tod ran on, whistling a line of a song that the squire used to sing in his young days:

"We all love a pretty girl, under the rose."

Mr. Marcus Allen left the Copse Farm with hearty thanks for its hospitality. He promised to come again in the summer, when the fields should be sweet with their mounds of hay and the golden corn was ripening.

No sooner had he gone than John Drench asked Jessy to promise to be his wife. Whether he had felt any secret jealousy of Mr. Marcus Allen and his attractions, and deemed it well to secure Jessy as soon as the coast was clear, he spoke out. Jessy did not receive the honor kindly. She tossed her pretty head in violent rage; the idea, she said, of her marrying *him*. Jessy had never flirted with John Drench since the Aberystwith journey, or encouraged him in

any way—that much was certain. There ensued unpleasantness at the farm. Mr. Page decidedly approved of the suitor; he alone had perceived nothing of Susan's hopes; and, perhaps for the first time in his life, he spoke sharply to Jessy. John Drench was not to be despised, he told her; his father was a wealthy man, and John would have a substantial portion; more than double enough to put him into the largest and best farm in the country; Mr. Drench was only waiting for a good one to fall in, to take it for him. No; Jessy would not listen. And as the days went on and John Drench, *as she said*, strove to push his suit on every opportunity, she conceived, or professed, a downright aversion to him. Sadly miserable indeed she seemed, crying often; and saying she would rather go out to be a lady's-maid to some well-born lady than stay at home to be persecuted. Miss Susan was in as high a state of rapture as the iniquity of false John Drench permitted; and said it served the man right for making an oaf of himself.

"Let be," cried old Page of Jessy. "She'll come to her senses in time." But Miss Abigail, regarding Jessy in silence with her critical eyes, took up the notion that the girl had some inward source of discomfort, with which John Drench had nothing to do.

It was close upon this, hardly beyond the middle of January, when one Monday evening Duffham trudged over from Church Dykely to have a match at chess with the squire. Hard weather had set in; ice and snow lay on the ground. Mrs. Todhetley nursed her face by the fire, for she had toothache as usual; Tod watched the chess; I was reading. In the midst of a silence the door opened, and old Thomas ushered in John Drench, a huge red comforter round his neck, his hat in his hand.

"Good-evening, squire; good-evening, ma'am," said he in his shy way, nodding separately to the rest of us, as he unwound the comforter. "I've come for Miss Jessy, please."

"Come for Miss Jessy!" was the squire's surprised echo. "Miss Jessy's not here. Take a seat, Mr. John."

"Not here?" cried Drench, opening his eyes in something like affright, and totally disregarding the invitation to sit down. "Not here! Why where can she have got to? Surely she has not fallen down in the snow and ice, and disabled herself!"

"Why did you think she was here?"

"I don't know," he replied, after a pause, during which he seemed to be lost. "Miss Jessy was not at home at tea; later, when I was leaving for the night, Miss Abigail asked me if I would come over here first and fetch Jessy. I put no questions, but came off at once."

"She has not been here," said Mrs. Todhetley. "I have not seen Jessy Page since yesterday afternoon, when I spoke to her coming out of church."

John Drench looked about as mystified as man can well look. That there must have been some misapprehension on Miss Page's part; or else on his, and he had come to the wrong house; or that poor Jessy had come to grief in the snow on her way to us, seemed certain. He drank a glass of ale, and went away.

They were over again at breakfast time in the morning, John Drench and Miss Abigail herself, bringing strange news. The

latter's face turned white as she told it. Jessy Page had not been found. John Drench and two of the men had been out all night in the fields and lanes, searching for her. Miss Abigail gave us the reasons for thinking Jessy had come to Dyke Manor.

On the Sunday afternoon, when the Miss Pages went home from church, Jessy, instead of turning in-doors with them, continued her way onward to the cottage of a poor old woman named Matt, saying Mrs. Todhetley had told her the old granny was very ill. At six o'clock, when they had tea—tea was always late on Sunday evenings, as Sally had leave to stay out gossiping for a good hour after service—it was discovered that Jessy had not come in. Charley was sent out after her, and met her at the gate. She had a chiding from her sister for staying out after dark had fallen; but all she said in excuse was, that the old granny was so very ill. That passed. On the Monday, soon after dinner, she came down-stairs with her things on, saying she was going over to Dyke Manor, having promised Mrs. Todhetley to let her know the real state of Granny Matt. "Don't thee get slipping in the snow, Jessy," said Mr. Page to her, half jokingly. "No danger, father," she replied; and went up and kissed him fondly. As she did not return by tea-time Miss Page took it for granted she was staying the evening with us. Since that, she had not been seen.

It seemed very odd. Mrs. Todhetley said that in talking with Jessy in the porch, she had incidentally mentioned the sickness of Granny Matt. Jessy immediately said she would go there and see her; and if she found her very ill would send word to Dyke Manor. Talk as they would, there was no more to be made of it than that: Jessy had quitted home to come to us, and was lost by the way.

Lost to her friends, at any rate, if not to herself. John Drench and Miss Page departed; and all day long the search after Jessy and the speculation as to what had become of her continued. At first, no one had glanced at anything except some untoward accident as the sole likely cause, but gradually the opinions veered round to a different fear. They began to think she might have run away!

Run away to escape Mr. John Drench's persevering attentions; and to seek the post of lady's-maid—which she had been expressing a wish for. John stated, however, that he had *not* persecuted her; that he had resolved to let a little time go by in silence, and then try his luck again. Granny Matt was questioned, and declared most positively that the young lady had not stayed ten minutes with her; that it was only "duskish" when she went away. "Duskish" at that season, in the broad open country, with the white snow on the ground, would mean about five o'clock. What had Jessy done with herself during the other hour—for it was past six when she got home—and why should she have excused her tardiness by implying that Granny Matt's illness had kept her?

No one could fathom it. No one ever knew. She might have gone up in a balloon and paid a visit to the moon during that hour, for all that was learned to the contrary, then or in the time to come. Before that first day of trouble was over, John Drench suggested worse. Deeply mortified at its being said that she might have run away from him, he breathed a hasty retort—that it was more likely

she had been run away with by Mr. Marcus Allen. Had William Page been strong enough he had certainly knocked him down for the aspersion. Susan heard it with a scared face: practical Miss Abigail sternly demanded upon what grounds he spoke. Upon no grounds in particular, Drench honestly answered: it was a thought that came into his mind and he spoke it on the spur of the moment. Any way, it was most unjust to say he had sent her.

The post-mistress at the general shop, Mrs. Smail, came forward with some testimony. Miss Jessy had been no less than twice to the shop during the past fortnight, nay, three times, she thought, to inquire after letters addressed J. P. The last time she got one. Had she been negotiating privately for the lady's maid situation, wondered Abigail: had she been corresponding with Mr. Marcus Allen, retorted Susan, in her ill nature; for she did not just now hold Jessy in any favor. Mrs. Smail was asked whether she had observed, amid the letters dropped into the box, any directed to Mr. Marcus Allen. But this had to be left an open question: there might have been plenty directed to him, or there might not have been a single one, was the unsatisfactory answer: she had "no 'call' to examine the directions, and as often did up the bag without her spectacles as with 'em."

All this, put together, certainly did not tend to show that Mr. Marcus Allen had anything to do with the disappearance. Jessy had now and then received letters from her former school-fellows addressed to the post-office—for her sisters, who considered her but a child, had an inconvenient habit of looking over her shoulder while she read them. The whole family, John Drench included, were up to their ears in agony: they did not know in what direction to look for her; were just in that state of mind when straws are caught at. Tod, knowing it could do no harm, told Miss Abigail about the kiss in the coppice. Miss Abigail quite laughed at it: kisses under the mistletoe were as common as blackberries with us, and just as innocent. She wrote to Aberystwith, asking questions about Marcus Allen, especially as to where he might be found. In answer, Mrs. Allen said she had not heard from him since he left Aberystwith, early in December, but had no doubt he was in London at his own home: she did not know exactly where that was, except that it was "somewhere at the West End."

This letter was no more satisfactory than anything else. It seemed all of a piece; all vague and doubtful. Miss Page read it to her father when he was in bed; Susan had just brought up his breakfast, and he sat up with the tray before him, his face nearly as white as the pillow behind him. They could not help seeing how ill and how shrunken he looked: Jessy's loss had told upon him.

"I think, father, I had better go to London, and see if anything's to be learned there," said Miss Page. "We can not live on, in this suspense."

"Ay; best go," answered he, "*I* can't live in it, either. I've had another sleepless night: and I wish that I was strong to travel. I should have been away long ago searching for the child—"

"You see, father, we don't know where to seek her; there's no clew," interrupted Abigail.

"I'd have gone from place to place till I found her. But now, I'll tell ye, Abigail, where you must go first—the thought has been in my mind all night. And that is to Madame Caron's."

"To Madame Caron's!" echoed both the sisters at once. "Madame Caron's!"

"Don't neither of ye remember how your mother used to talk of her? Ann Dicker she was. She knows a sight of great folks now—and it may be that Jessy's gone to her. Bond Street, or somewhere near to it, is where she lives."

In truth they had nearly forgotten the person spoken of. Madame Caron had once been plain Ann Dicker, of Church Dykely, intimate with William Page and his wife. She went to London when a young woman to learn the millinery and dress-making; married a Frenchman, and rose by degrees to be a fashionable court milliner. It struck Mr. Page, during the past night-watch, that Jessy might have applied to Madame Caron to help her in getting a place as lady's-maid.

"It's the likeliest thing she'd do," he urged, if her mind was bent that way. "How was she to find such a place of herself?—and I wish we had all been smothered afore we'd made her home here unhappy, and put her on to think of such a thing."

"Father, I don't think her home was made unhappy," said Miss Page.

"'I should like to be a lady's-maid, father, in some great duchess's family,' she says to me one day," continued the sorrowful man; "and I laughed, taking it for nothing but nonsense. 'Thee'd soon wish th'self back at home, child,' was all I said. Ay: she's off to Madam Caron's; little doubt on't; I can't tell how it was I never thought of it till to-night."

"I shouldn't wonder but what it is so," slowly spoke Abigail, seizing on the probability in her sore perplexity.

"And some of you were for taking away my poor lamb's good name!" he added, with emotion. "She'd no more run away after Marcus Allen, or any other Marcus, than you two would run."

To resolve and to do were one with prompt Abigail Page. Not a moment lost she, now that some sort of clew was afforded to act upon. That same morning she was on her way to London, attended by John Drench.

* * * * * *

A large handsome double show-room. Brass hooks on the walls and slender bonnet-stands on the tables, garnished with gowns and mantles and head-gear and fal-lals; wide pier-glasses; sofas and chairs covered with chintz. Except for these articles, the room was empty. In a small apartment opening from it, called "the trying-on room," sat Madame Caron herself, taking a comfortable cup of tea and a toasted muffin, after the labors of the day were over. Not that the labors were great at that season: people who require court millinery being mostly out of town.

"You are wanted, if you please, madame, in the show-room," said a page in buttons, coming in to disturb the tea.

"Wanted!—at this hour!" cried Madame Caron, as she glanced at the time-piece, and saw it was on the stroke of six. "Who is it?"

"It's a lady and gentleman, madame. They look like travelers."

"Go in and light the gas," said madame.

"Passing through London and are requiring things in a hurry," thought she, mentally running through a list of some of her most fashionable customers.

She went in with a swimming courtesy—quite that of a Frenchwoman—and the parties, visitors and visited, gazed at each other in the gaslight. *They* saw a very stylish lady in rich black satin that stood on end, and lappets of point lace; *she* saw two homely country people, the one in a red comforter, muffled about his ears, the other in an antiquated fur tippet that must originally have come out of Noah's ark.

"Mon Dieu!" inwardly ejaculated madame, who had caught up a few of her husband's native sayings.

"Is it—Madame Caron?" questioned Miss Abigail, in hesitation. For, you see, she doubted whether it might not be one of Madame Caron's duchesses.

"I have the honor to be Madame Caron," replied the lady with her grandest air.

Thus put at ease in regard to identity, Miss Page introduced herself—and John Drench, son of Mr. Drench of the Upland Farm. Madame Caron—who had a good heart, and retained amid her grandeur a vivid remembrance of home and early friends—came down from her stilts on the instant, took off with her own hands the objectionable tippet, on the plea of heat, conducted them into the little room, and rang for a fresh supply of tea and muffins.

"I remember you so well when you were a little thing, Abigail," she said, her heart warming to the old days. "We always said you would grow up like your mother, and so you have. Ah, dear! that's something like a quarter of a century ago. As to you, Mr. John, your father and I were boy and girl sweethearts."

Over the refreshing tea and the buttered muffins, Abigail Page told her tale. The whole of it. Her father had warned her not to hint a word against Jessy; but there was something in the face before her that spoke of truth and trust; and, besides, she did not see her way clear *not* to speak of Marcus Allen. To leave him out altogether would have been like bargaining for a spring calf in the dark, as she said later to John Drench.

"I have never had a line from Jessy in all my life: I have neither seen her nor heard of her," said madame. "As to Mr. Marcus Allen, I don't know him personally myself, but Miss Connaway, my head dress-maker, does; for I have heard her speak of him. I can soon find out for you where he lives."

Miss Page thought she should like to see the head dress-maker, and a message was sent up for her. A neat little middle-aged woman came down, and was invited to the tea-table. Madame turned the conversation on Mr. Marcus Allen; telling Miss Connaway that these country friends of hers knew him slightly, and would be glad to get his address to call upon him; but she did not say a syllable about Jessy.

Mr. Marcus Allen had about two hundred a year of his own, and was an artist in water colors. The certain income made him idle; and he played just as often as he worked. The few pictures he

completed were good, and sold well. He shared a spacious painting room somewhere with a brother artist, but lived in chambers. All this Miss Connaway told readily: she had known him since he was a child.

Late though it was, Miss Abigail and her cavalier proceeded to Marcus Allen's lodgings; or "chambers," as they were ostentatiously called, and found him seated at dinner. He rose in the utmost astonishment at sight of them; an astonishment that looked thoroughly genuine.

Jessy missing! Jessy left her home! He could but reiterate the words in wondering disbelief. Abigail Page felt reassured from that moment; even jealous John Drench in his heart acquitted him. He had not written to Jessy, he said; he had nothing to write to her about, therefore it could not have been his letter she went to receive at the post-office; and most certainly she had not written to him. Miss Abigail—willing perhaps to offer some excuse for coming to him—said they had thought it possible Jessy might have consulted him about getting a lady's-maid's place. She never had consulted him, he answered, but had once told him that she intended to go out as one. He should imagine, he added, it was what she had done.

Mr. Marcus Allen pressed them to sit down and partake of his dinner, such as it was; he poured out glasses of wine; he was altogether hospitable. But they declined all. He then asked how he could assist them; he was most anxious they should find her, and would help toward it in any way that lay in his power.

"He knows no more about her than we know," said John Drench as they turned out into the lighted streets, on their way back to the inn they had put up at, which had been recommended to them by Mr. Page. "I'm sorry I misjudged him."

"I am sorry too, John Drench," was Miss Abigail's sorrowful answer. "But for listening to the words you said, we should never have had such a wicked thought about her, poor child, and been spared many a bitter moment. Where in the wide world are we to look for her now?"

The wide world did not make sign of answer. London, with its teeming millions, was an enormous arena—and there was no especial cause to suppose Jessy Page had come to it.

"I am afraid it will be of no use to stay here longer," said Miss Abigail to John Drench, after another unsatisfactory day went by, during which Marcus Allen called upon them at the inn, and said he had spoken to the police. It was John Drench's own opinion.

"Why, you see, Miss Abigail, that to look for her here, not knowing where or how, is like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay," said John.

They got home none too soon. Two unexpected events were there to greet them. The one was Mr. Page who was lying low in an attack of paralysis; the other was a letter from Jessy.

It gave no clew to where she was. All she said in it was that she had found a situation, and hoped to suit and be happy in it; and she sent her love to all.

And the weeks and the months went on.

PART THE SECOND.

COMING HOME TO DIE.

THE snow was falling. At one of the windows of the parlor at Copse Farm, stood Susan Page, her bunch of short dark curls fastened back with a comb on both sides of her thin face, her trim figure neat in a fine merino gown of crimson. Her own portion of household-work was already done, though it was not yet midday, and she was about to sit down, dressed for the day, to some sewing that lay on the work-table near.

"I was in hopes the snow was over: the morning looked so clear and bright," she said to herself, watching the large flakes. "Leek will have a job to get the truck to the church."

It was a long, narrow room. At the other end, by the fire, sat Mr. Page in his arm-chair. He had dropped asleep, his cheek leaning on his hand. As Miss Susan sat down and took up her work, a large pair of scissors fell to the ground with a crash. "Hush—sh—sh!" said she softly, as if the scissors could hear, and glanced round at her father. He did not wake. That stroke of a year ago had dulled his faculties.

"I should uncommonly like to know who did this—whether Sally or the woman," she exclaimed, examining the work she had to do. One of Mr. Page's new shirts had been torn in the washing, and she was about to mend the rent. "That woman has a heavy hand; and Sally a careless one. It ought not to have been ironed."

The door opened, and John Drench came in. When he saw that Mr. Page slept, he walked up the room toward Miss Susan. In the past twelvemonth—for that length of time had rolled on since the trouble about Jessy and her mysterious disappearance—John Drench had had time to return to his first allegiance (or, as Miss Susan mentally put it, get over his folly); and he had decidedly done it.

"Did you want anything?" asked Susan in a cold tone. For she made a point of being short with him—for his own benefit.

"I wanted to ask the master whether he'd have that ditch made, that he was talking of," was the answer. "There's no hurry: not much to be done anywhere while this weather lasts."

She made no comment. John Drench stood, waiting for Mr. Page to wake, looking alternately at the snow and at Miss Susan's steel thimble and nimble fingers. Very deftly was she doing the work, holding the linen gingerly, that the well-ironed bosom and wrist bands might not get a crease and unfit the shirt for wear. He was thinking what a good wife she would make: for there was nothing, in the shape of usefulness, that Susan Page could not put her hand to, and put it well.

"Miss Susan, I was going to ask a question of you," he began, standing uncomfortably on one leg. "I've been wanting to do it for this good bit now, but—"

"Pick up my cotton," said Miss Susan tartly, dropping a reel on purpose.

"But I b'lieve I have wanted courage," resumed he after doing as he was bid. "It *is* a puzzling task how to do it for the best, and what to say. If you—"

Open flew the door, and in came Miss Page, in her thick white kitchen apron. Her gown-sleeves were rolled above her elbows, her floured hands were lightly wiped. John Drench, struck into himself, thought he should never have pluck to speak again

"Susan, do you know where that old red receipt book is?" she asked, in a low tone, glancing at her sleeping father. "I am not certain about the proportions for the lemon-cake."

"The red receipt-book?" repeated Susan. "I have not seen it for ever so long."

"Nor I. I don't think I have had occasion to use it since last Christmas Eve. I know I had to look at it then for the lemon-cake. Sally says she's sure it is somewhere in this room."

"Then you had better send Sally to find it, Abigail."

Instead of that, Miss Page began looking herself. On the book-shelves; on the sideboard; in all the nooks and corners. It was found in the empty drawer—empty except for that—of an unused table that stood against the wall.

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed, as she drew it out. "I wonder who put it in here?"

In turning over the leaves to look for what she wanted, a piece of paper, loosely folded, fell to the ground. John Drench picked it up.

"Why!" he said, "it is a note from Jessy."

It was the letter written to them by Jessy, saying she had found a situation and hoped to suit and be happy in it. The *one* letter: for no other had ever come. Abigail, missing the letter months ago, supposed it had got burned.

"Yes," she said with a sigh, as she glanced over the few lines now, standing by Susan's work-table, "it is Jessy's letter. She might have written again. Every morning of my life for weeks and weeks, I kept looking for the letter-man to bring another. But the hope died out at last, for it never came."

"She is a heartless baggage!" cried Miss Susan. "In her grand lady's-maid's place, amid her high people, she is content to forget and abandon us. I'd never have believed it of her."

There ensued a pause. The subject was a painful one. Mortifying too: for nobody likes to be set at naught and forgotten by one that they have loved and cherished and brought up from a little child. Abigail Page had tears in her eyes.

"It's just a year ago to-day that she came into the church to help us dress it," said John Drench, his tender tone of regret grating on Miss Susan's ear. "In her blue mantle: looking sweeter and brighter than a fairy princess."

"Did you ever see a fairy princess, pray?" asked Miss Susan, sharply taking him up. "She acted like a princess, didn't she?"

"Best to forget her," interposed Abigail, suppressing a sigh. "As Susan says, she is heartless. Almost wicked: for what is worse than ingratitude? Never to write; never to let us know

where her situation is and with what people: never to ask or care whether her poor father, who had nothing but love for her, is living or dead? It's best to forget her."

She went out of the room with the note and receipt-book as she spoke, softly closing the door behind her, as one does who is feeling troubled. Miss Susan worked on with rapid and angry stitches; John Drench looked out on the low-lying snow. The storm had passed: the sky was blue again.

Yes. Christmas Eve had come round, making it just a year since Jessy in her pretty blue mantle had chosen the sprays of holly in the church. They had never had from her but that one first unsatisfactory letter: they knew no more how she went, or why she went, or where she was, than they had known then. No news whatever came of her: she was as a myth; as a thing that had never had any place in the world. Within a week or two of the unsatisfactory journey to London of Miss Abigail and John Drench, a letter came to the farm from Mr. Marcus Allen, inquiring after Jessy, expressing hopes that she had been found and was at home again. It was not answered: Miss Page, busy with her father's illness, neglected it at first, and then thought it did not matter.

Mr Page had recovered from his stroke: but he would never be good for anything again. He was very much changed; would sit for hours and never speak: at times his daughters thought him a little silly, as if his intellect were failing. Miss Page, with John Drench's help, managed the farm: though she always made it a point of duty to consult her father and ask for his orders. In the month of June they heard again from Mr. Marcus Allen. He wrote to say that he was sorry not to fulfill his promise (made in the winter's visit) of coming to stay with them during the time of haymaking, but he was busy finishing a painting and could not leave it; he hoped to come at some other time. And this was now December.

Susan Page worked on: John Drench looked from the window. The young lady was determined not to break the silence.

"The Dunn Farm is to let," said he suddenly.

"Is it?" slightingly returned Miss Susan.

"My father has some thoughts of taking it for me. It's good land."

"No better than other land about here."

"It's very good, Susan. And just the place I should like. There's a nice convenient house too, on it."

Susan Page began rummaging in the deep drawer of the work-table for her box of buttons. She had a great mind to hum a tune.

"But I couldn't take it, or let father take it for me, unless you'd promise to go to it with me, Susan."

"Promise to go to it with you, John Drench!"

"I'd make you as good a husband as I know how. Perhaps you'll think of it."

No answer. She was doubling her thread to sew on the button.

"*Will* you think of it, Miss Susan?"

"Well—yes, I will," she said in a softer tone. "And if I decide

to bring my mind to have you, John Drench, I'll hope to make you a good and faithful wife."

He held out his hand to shake hers upon the bargain. Their eyes met in kindliness; and John Drench knew that the Dunn Farm would have its mistress.

We were going to dress the church this year as we did the last. Clerk Bumford's cough was bad to hear, and the old sexton was laid by as usual. Tod and I got to the church early in the afternoon, and saw the Miss Pages wading their way through the coppice, over their ankles in snow; the one lady having finished her cake-making and the other her shirt-mending.

"Is Leek not here yet!" cried they in surprise. "We need not have made so much haste."

Leek with his large truck of holly was somewhere on the road. He had started, as Miss Page said, while they were at dinner. And he was not to be seen!

"It is all through his obstinacy," cried Susan. "I told him he had better take the highway, though it was a bit further round; but he said he knew he could get well through the little valley. That's where he has stuck, truck and all."

John Drench came up as she was speaking. He had been on some errand to Church Dykely; and gave a bad account of the snow on the roads. This was the third day of it. The skies just now were blue as in spring; the sun, drawing toward the west, was without a cloud. After waiting a few minutes, John Drench started to meet Leek and help him on; and we cooled our heels in the church-porch, unable to get inside. As it was supposed Leek would be there sooner than anybody else, the key of the church had been given to him that he might get the holly in. There we waited in the cold. At last, out of patience, Tod went off in John Drench's wake, and I after him.

It was as Miss Susan surmised. Leek and his truck had stuck in the valley: a low, narrow neck of land connecting a by-way to the farm with the lane. The snow was above the wheels: Leek could neither get on nor turn back. He and John Drench were hard at work, pulling and pushing; and the obstinate truck refusing to move an inch. With the help of our strength—if mine was not worth much, Tod's *was*—we got it on. But all this caused ever so much delay: and the dressing was begun when it ought to have been nearing its ending. I could not help thinking of the other Christmas Eve; and of pretty Jessy who had helped—and of Miss Susan's blowing her up for coming in her best blue mantle—and of the sudden looming in upon us of the stranger, Marcus Allen. Perhaps the rest were thinking about it as I was. One thing was certain—that there was no liveliness in this year's dressing; we were all as silent and dull as ditch-water. Charley Page, who had made enough noise last year, was away this. He went to school at Worcester now, and had gone to spend the Christmas with some people in Gloucestershire, instead of coming home.

The work was in progress, when who should look in upon us but Duffham. He was passing by to visit somebody ill in the cottages. "Rather late, sha'n't you be?" cried he, seeing that there

was hardly any green up yet. And we told him about the truck sticking in the snow.

"What possessed Leek to take it through the valley?" returned Duffham.

"Because he is fonder of having his own way than any mule," called out Miss Susan from the aisle.

Duffham laughed. "Don't forget the gala bunch over the parson's head; it looked well last year," said he, turning to go out. And we told him there was no danger of forgetting it; it was one of our improvements on old Bumford's dressing.

The dark overtook us before half the work was done. There was nothing for it but to get candles from the Copse Farm to finish by. Nobody volunteered to fetch them: a walk through the snow did not look lively in prospective to any one of us, and Leek had gone off somewhere. "I suppose it must be me," said John Drench, coming out from amidst the holly to start: when Miss Page suddenly bethought herself of what the rest of us were forgetting—that there might be candles in the church. On a winter's afternoon, when it grew dark early and the parson could not see through his spectacles to finish his sermon, Clerk Bumford would go stumping into the place under the belfry, and reappear with a lighted candle and hand it up to the pulpit. He ought to have a stock of candles in store.

John Drench struck some matches, and we went to explore Bumford's den—a place dimly lighted by the open slits in the belfry above. The first thing seen was his black gown hanging up, next a horn lantern on the floor and the grave-digging tools, then an iron candlestick with an end of candle in it, then a stick half a mile long that he menaced the boys with if they laughed in church; and next a round tin candle-box on a nail in the wall. It was a prize.

There were ten candles in it. Ten! Leaving one in case it should be wanted on the morrow afternoon, the nine others were set alight. One was put into the iron candlestick, the rest we stuck upright in dropped dabs of tallow, wherever one was wanted: how else could they be set up? It was a grand illumination: and we laughed over Clerk Bumford's dismay when he should find his store of candles gone.

That took time: finding the candles, and dropping the grease, and talking and laughing. In the midst of it the clock struck five. Upon that, Miss Abigail told us to hinder no more time, or the work would not be done by midnight. So we set to with a will. In a couple of hours all the dressing was finished, and the branches were ready to be hung over the pulpit. John Drench felt for the string. He seemed to take his time over it.

"Where on earth is it?" cried he, searching his pockets. "I'm sure I brought some."

He might have brought it; but it was certain he had not got it then. Miss Abigail, who had no patience with carelessness, told him rather sharply that if he had put it in his pockets at all, there it would be now.

"Well, I did," he answered, in his quiet way. "I put it in on purpose. I'm sure I don't know where it can have got to."

And there we were: at a standstill for a bit of string. Looking

at one another like so many helpless noodles, and the flaring candles nearly come to an end! Tod said, tear a strip off the tail of Bumford's gown; he'd never miss it; for which Miss Abigail gave it him as sharply as if he had proposed to tear it off the parson's.

"I might get a bit of string at old Bumford's," I said. "In a few minutes I'll be back with it."

It was one of the lightest nights ever seen: the air clear, the moon bright, the ground white with snow. Rushing round the north and unfrequented side of the church, where the grass on the graves was long and nobody ever walked, save old Bumford when he wanted to cut across the near way to his cottage, I saw something stirring against the church wall. Something dark: that seemed to have been looking in at the window, and now crouched down with a sudden movement in the corner made by the buttress, as if afraid of being seen.

"Is that you, Leek?" I called out.

There was no answer: no movement: nothing but a dark heap lying low. I thought it might be a fox: and crossed over to look.

Well—I had had surprises in my life, but never one that so struck upon me as this. Foxes don't wear women's clothes: this thing did. I pulled aside the dark covering cloak, and a face stood out white and cold in the moonlight—the face of Jessy Page.

You may fancy it is a slice of romance this: made up for effect out of my imagination; but it is the real truth, as everybody about the place can testify to, and its strangeness is talked of still. Yet there are stranger coincidences in life than this. On Christmas Eve, a year before, Jessy Page had been helping to dress the church, in her fine blue mantle, in her beauty, in her light-hearted happiness: on this Christmas Eve when we were dressing it again, she reappeared. But how changed! Wan, white, faint, thin! I am not sure that I should have known her but for her voice. Shrinking, as it struck me, with shame and fear, she put up her trembling hands in supplication.

"Don't betray me!—don't call out!" she implored in weak, feverish, anxious tones. "Go away and leave me. Let me lie here unsuspected until they have all gone away."

What ought I to do? I was just as bewildered as it's possible for a fellow to be. It's no exaggeration to say that I thought her dying: and it would never do to leave her there to die.

The stillness was broken by a commotion. While she lay with her thin hands raised, and I was gazing down on her poor face, wondering what to say, and how to act, Miss Susan came flying round the corner after me.

"Johnny Ludlow! Master Johnny! Don't go. There's no need. We have found the string under the unused holly. Why!—what's that?"

No chance of concealment for Jessy now. Susan Page made for the buttress, and saw the white face lying in the moonlight.

"It's Jessy," I whispered.

With a shriek that might have scared away all the ghosts in the church-yard, Susan Page called out for Abigail. They heard it through the window, and came rushing out, thinking Susan must

have fallen at least into the fangs of a winter wolf. Miss Susan's voice shook as she spoke: spoke in a whisper.

"Here's Jessy—come back at last!"

Disbelieving Abigail Page went down on her knees in the snow to trace the features, and convince herself. Yes, it was Jessy. She had fainted now, and lay motionless. Leek came up then, and stood staring.

Where had she come from?—how had she got there? It was just as though she had dropped from the skies with the snow. And what was to be done with her?

"She must—come home," said Abigail.

But she spoke hesitatingly, as though some impediments might lie in the way: and she looked round in a dreamy manner on the open country, all so white and dreary in the moonlight.

"Yes, there's no other place—of course it must be the farm," she added. "Perhaps you can bring her between you. But I'll go on and speak to my father first."

It was easy for one to carry her, she was so thin and light. John Drench lifted her and they all went off: leaving me and Leek to finish up in the church, and put out the guttering candles.

William Page was sitting in his favorite place, the wide chimney-corner of the kitchen, quietly smoking his pipe, when his daughter broke in upon him with the strange news. Just in the same way that, a year before, she had broken in upon him with that other news—that a gentleman had arrived, uninvited, on a visit to the farm. This news was more startling than that.

"Are they bringing her home?—how long will they be?" cried the old man with feverish eagerness, as he let fall his long church-warden pipe, and broke it. "Abigail, will they be long?"

"Father, I want to say something: I came on to say it," returned Miss Page, and she was trembling too. "I don't like her face: it is wan, and thin, and full of suffering: but there's a look in it that—that seems to tell of shame."

"To tell of what?" he asked, not catching the word.

"May heaven forgive me if I misjudge her! The fear crossed me, as I saw her lying there, that her life may not have been innocent since she left us: why else should she come back in this most strange way? Must we take her in all the same, father?"

"Take her in!" he repeated in amazement. "YES. What are you thinking of, child, to ask it?"

"It's the home of me and Susan, father: it has been always an honest one in the sight of the neighbors. May be they'll be hard upon us for receiving her into it."

He stared as one who does not understand, and then made a movement with his hands, as if warding off her words and the neighbors' hardness together.

"Let her come, Abigail! Let her come, poor stray lamb. Christ wouldn't turn away a little one that had strayed from the fold: should her own father do it?"

And when they brought her in, and put her in an easy-chair by the sitting-room fire, stirring it into a hot blaze, and gave her hot tea and brandy in it, William Page sat down by her side, and shed fast tears over her, as he fondly stroked her head.

Gay and green looked the church on Christmas morning, the sun shining in upon us as brightly as it shone a year before. The news of Jessy Page's return and the curious manner of it, had spread, causing the congregation to turn their eyes in natural instinct or the Pages' pew. Perhaps not one but recalled the last Christmas—and the gallant stranger who had sat in it, and found the places in the prayer-book for Jessy. Only Mr. Page was there to-day. He came slowly in with his thick stick—for he walked badly since his illness, and dragged one leg behind the other Before the thanksgiving prayer the parson opened a paper and read out a notice. Such things were uncommon in our church, and it caused a stir.

"William Page desires to return thanks to Almighty God for a great mercy vouchsafed to him."

We walked to the Copse Farm with him after service. Considering that he had been returning thanks, he seemed dreadfully subdued. He didn't know how it was yet; where she had been, or why she had come home in the manner she did, he told the squire; but, anyway, she had come. Come to die, it might be, but *come home*, and that was enough.

Mrs. Todhetley went upstairs to see her. They had given her the best bed, the one they had put Marcus Allen in. She lay in it like a lily. It was what Mrs. Todhetley said when she came down: "like a lily, so white and delicate." There was no talking. Jessy mostly kept her eyes shut and her face turned away. Miss Page whispered that they had not questioned her yet: she seemed too weak to bear it. "But what do you *think?*" asked Mrs. Todhetley in return. "I am afraid to think," was all the answer. In coming away, Mrs. Todhetley stooped over the bed to kiss her.

"Oh, don't, don't!" said Jessy faintly: "you might not if you knew all. I am not worth it."

"Perhaps I should kiss you all the more, my poor child," answered Mrs. Todhetley. And she came down-stairs with red eyes.

But Miss Susan Page was burning with impatience to know the ins and outs of the strange affair. Naturally so. It had brought more scandal and gossip on the Copse Farm than even the running away of the year before. That was bad enough: this was worse. Altogether Jessy was the home's heartsore. Mr. Page spoke of her as a lamb, a wanderer returned to the fold, and Susan heard it with compressed lips: in her private opinion, she had more justly been called an ungrateful girl.

"Now then, Jessy, you must let us know a little about yourself," began Susan on this same afternoon when she was with her alone, and Jessy lay apparently stronger, refreshed with the dinner and the long rest. Abigail had gone to church with Mr. Page. Susan could not remember that any of them had gone to church before on Christmas Day after the morning service: but there was no festive gathering to keep them at home to-day. Unconsciously, perhaps, Susan resented the fact. Even John Drench was dining at his father's. "Where have you been all this while in London?"

Jessy suddenly lifted her arm to shade her eyes, and remained silent.

"It *is* in London, I conclude, that you have been? Come: answer me."

"Yes," said Jessy faintly.

"And *where* have you been? In what part of it?—who with?"

"Don't ask me," was the reply, given with a sob of pain.

"Not ask you! But we must ask you. And you must answer. Where have you been, and what have you been doing?"

"I—can't tell," sobbed Jessy, catching up her breath. "The story is too long."

"Story too long!" echoed Susan quickly, "you might say in half a dozen words—and leave close explanation until to-morrow. Did you find a place in town?"

"Yes, I found a place."

"A lady's-maid's place?—as you said."

Jessy turned her face to the wall, and never spoke.

"Now, this won't do," cried Miss Susan, not choosing to be thwarted: and no doubt Jessy, hearing the determined tone, felt something like a reed in her hands. "Just you tell me a little."

"I am very ill, Susan; I can't talk much," was the pleading excuse. "If you'd only let me be quiet."

"It will no more hurt you to say in a few words where you have been than to make excuses that you can't say," persisted Miss Susan, giving a flick to the skirt of her new puce silk gown. "Your conduct altogether has been most extraordinary, quite baffling to us at home, and I must hear some explanation of it."

"The place I went to was too hard for me," said Jessy after a pause, speaking out of the pillow.

"Too hard!"

"Yes; too hard. My heart was breaking with its hardness, and I couldn't stop in it. Oh, be merciful to me, Susan! don't ask more."

Susan Page thought that when the mysterious answers like these were creeping out, there was all the greater need that she should ask more.

"Who found you the place at first, Jessy?"

Not a word. Susan asked again.

"I—got it through an advertisement," said Jessy at length.

Advertisements in those days, down in our rural district, were looked upon as wonderful things, and Miss Susan opened her eyes in surprise. A faint idea pervaded her that Jessy could not be telling the truth.

"In that letter that you wrote to us, the only one you did write, you asserted that you liked the place."

"Yes. That was at first. But afterward—oh, afterward it got cruelly hard."

"Why did you not change it for another?"

Jessy made no answer. Susan heard the sobs in her throat.

"Now, Jessy, don't be silly. I ask why did you not get another place, if you were unable to stay in that one?"

"I couldn't have got another, Susan. I would never have got another."

"Why not?" persisted Susan.

"I—I—don't you see how weak I am?" she asked with some energy, showing her face for a moment to Susan.

And its wan pain, its depth of anguish, disarmed Susan. Jessy looked like a once fair blossom on which a blight had passed.

"Well, Jessy, we will leave these matters until later. But there's one thing you must answer. What induced you to take this disreputable mode of coming back?"

A dead silence.

"Could you not have written to say you were coming, as any sensible girl would, that you might have been properly met and received? Instead of appearing like a vagabond, to be picked up by anybody."

"I never meant to come home—to the house."

"But *why?*" asked Susan.

"Oh, because—because for my ingratitude in running away—and never writing—and—and all that."

"That is, you were ashamed to come and face us."

"Yes, I was ashamed," said Jessy, shivering.

"And no wonder. Why did you go?"

Jessy gave a despairing sigh. Leaving that question in abeyance, Susan returned to the former one.

"If you did not mean to come home, what brought you down here at all?"

"It didn't matter where I went. And my heart was yearning for a look at the old place—and so I came."

"And if we had not found you under the church wall—and we never should but for Johnny Ludlow's running out to get some string—where should you have gone, pray?"

"Crawled under some haystack, and let the cold and hunger kill me."

"Don't be a simpleton," reproved Susan.

"I wish it had been so," returned Jessy. "I'd rather be dying there in quiet. Oh, Susan, I am ill; I am indeed! Let me be at peace!"

The appeal shut up Susan Page. She did not want to be too hard.

Mr. Duffham came in after church. Abigail had told him that she did not like Jessy's looks; nor yet her cough. He went up alone, and was at the bedside before Jessy was aware. She put up her hand to hide her face, but not in time: Duffham had seen it. Doctors don't get shocks in a general way: they are too familiar with appearances that frighten other people; but he started a little. If ever he saw coming death in a face, he thought he saw it in that of Jessy Page.

He drew away the shading hand, and looked at her. Duffham was pompous on the whole and thought a good deal of his gold-headed cane, but he was a tender man with the sad and sick. After that, he sat down and began asking her a few things—where she had been, and what she had done. Not out of curiosity, or quite with the same motive that Miss Susan had just asked; but because he wished to find out whether her illness was more on the body or the mind. She would not answer. Only cried softly.

"My dear," said Duffham, "I must have you tell me a little of the past. Don't be afraid: it shall go no further. If you only knew the strange confidences that are sometimes placed in me, Jessy, you would not hesitate."

No, she would not speak of her own accord, so he began to pump her. Doing it very kindly and soothingly: had Jessy spent her year in London robbing all the banks, one might have thought she could only have yielded to his wish to come to the bottom of it. Duffham listened to her answers, and sat with a puzzled face. She told him what she had told Susan: that her post of lady's-maid had been too hard for her and worn her to what she was: that she had shrunk from returning home on account of her ingratitude, and should not have returned ever of her own will. But she had yearned for a sight of the old place, and so came down by rail, and walked over after dark. In passing the church she saw it lighted up; and lingered, peeping in. She never meant to be seen; she should have gone away somewhere before morning. Nothing more.

Nothing more! Duffham sat listening to her. He pushed back the pretty golden hair (no more blue ribbons in it now), lost in thought.

"*Nothing* more, Jessy? There must have been something more, I think, to have brought you into this state. What was it?"

"No," she faintly said: "only the hard work I had to do; and the thought of how I left my home; and—and my unhappiness. I was unhappy always, nearly from my first entering. The work was hard."

"What was the work?"

"It was—"

A long pause. Mr. Duffham, always looking at her, waited.

"It was sewing; dress-making. And—there was sitting up at nights."

"Who was the lady you served? What was her name?"

"I can't tell it," answered Jessy, her cheeks flushing to a wild hectic.

The surgeon suddenly turned the left hand toward him, and looked at the forefinger. It was smooth as ivory.

"Not much sign of sewing there, Jessy."

She drew it under the clothes. "It is some little time since I did any; I was too sick," she answered. "Mr. Duffham, I have told you all there is to tell. The place was too hard for me, and it made me ill."

It was all she told. Duffham wondered whether it was, in substance, all she had to tell. He went down and entered the parlor with a grave face: Mr. Page, his daughters, and John Drench were there. The doctor said Jessy must have perfect rest, tranquillity, and the best of nourishment; and he would send some medicine. Abigail put a shawl over her head, and walked with him across the garden.

"You will tell *me* what your opinion is, Mr. Duffham."

"Ay. It is no good one, Miss Abigail."

"Is she very ill?"

"Very. In so far as that I do not think she will materially rally. Her chest and lungs are both weak."

"Her mother's were before her. As I told you, Jessy looks to me just as my mother used to look in her last illness."

Mr. Duffham went through the gate without saying more. The snow was sparkling like diamonds in the moonlight.

"I think I gather what you mean," resumed Abigail. "That she is, in point of fact, dying."

"That's it. As I truly believe."

They looked at each other in the clear light air. "But not—surely, Mr. Duffham, not immediately?"

"Not immediately. It may be weeks off yet. Mind—I don't assert that she is absolutely past hope; I only think it. It is possible that she may rally, and recover."

"It might not be the happier for her," said Abigail, under her breath. "She is in a curiously miserable state of mind—as you no doubt saw. Mr. Duffham, did she tell you anything?"

"She says she took a place as lady's-maid; that the work proved too hard for her; and that, with the remorse for her ingratitude toward her home, made her ill."

"She said the same to Susan this afternoon. Well, we must wait for more. Good-night, Mr. Duffham: I am sure you will do all you can."

Of course Duffham meant to do all he could; and from that time he began to attend her regularly.

Jessy Page's coming home, with, as Miss Susan had put it, the vagabond manner of it, was a nine days' wonder. The neighbors went making calls at the Copse Farm, to talk about it and to see her. In the latter hope they failed. Jessy showed a great fear of seeing any one of them; would put her head under the bed-clothes and lie there shaking till the house was clear; and Duffham said she was not to be crossed.

Her sisters got to know no more of the past. Not a syllable. They questioned and cross-questioned her; but she only stuck to her text. It was the work that had been too much for her; the people she served were cruelly hard.

"I really think it must be so; that she has nothing else to tell," remarked Abigail to Susan one morning, as they sat alone at breakfast. "But she must have been a downright simpleton to stay."

"I can't make her out," returned Susan, hard of belief. "Why should she not say where it was, and who the people are? Here comes the letter-man."

The letter-man—as he was called—was bringing a letter for Miss Page. Letters at the Copse Farm were rare, and she opened it with curiosity. It proved to be from Mrs. Allen of Aberystwith; and out of it dropped two cards, tied together with silver cord.

Mrs. Allen wrote to say that her distant relative, Marcus, was married. He had been married on Christmas Eve to a Miss Mary Goldbeater, a rich heiress, and they had sent her cards. Thinking the Miss Pages might like to see the cards (as they knew something of him) she had forwarded them.

Abigail took the cards up. "Mr. Marcus Allen. Mrs. Marcus Allen." And on hers was the address: "Gypsy Villas, Montgomery Road, Brompton." "I think he might have been polite enough to send us cards also," observed Abigail.

Susan put the cards on the waiter when she went upstairs with her sister's tea. Jessy, looking rather more feverish than usual in a morning, turned the cards about in her slender hands.

"I have heard of her, this Mary Goldbeater," said Jessy, biting her parched lips. "They say she's pretty, and—and very rich."

"Where did you hear of her?" asked Susan.

"Oh, in—let me think. In the work-room."

"Now what do you mean by that?" cried Miss Susan, catching at the words. "A work-room implies a dress maker's establishment, and you tell us you were a lady's-maid."

Jessy seemed unable to answer.

"I don't believe you were at either the one place or the other. You are deceiving us, Jessy."

"No," gasped Jessy.

"Did you ever see Mr. Marcus Allen when you were in town?"

"Mr. Marcus Allen?" repeated Jessy after a pause, just as if she were unable to recall who Mr. Marcus Allen was.

"The Mr. Marcus Allen you knew at Aberystwith; he who came here afterward," went on Susan impatiently. "Are you losing your memory, Jessy?"

"No, I never saw the Marcus Allen I knew here—and there," was Jessy's answer, her face white and still as death.

"Why! Did you know any other Marcus Allen, then?" questioned Susan, in surprise. For the words had seemed to imply it.

"No," replied Jessy. "No."

"She seems queerer than usual—I hope her mind's not going," thought Susan. "Did you ever go to see Madame Caron, Jessy, while you were in London?"

"Never. Why should I? I didn't know Madame Caron."

"When Marcus Allen wrote to excuse himself from visiting us in the summer, he said he would be sure to come later," resumed Susan. "I wonder if he will keep his promise."

"No—never," answered Jessy.

"How do you know?"

"Oh—I don't think it. He'd not care to come. Especially now he's married."

"And you never saw him in town, Jessy? Never even met him by chance?"

"I've told you—No. Do you suppose I should be likely to call upon Marcus Allen? As to meeting him by chance, it is not often I went out, I can tell you."

"Well, sit up and take your breakfast," concluded Susan.

A thought had crossed Susan Page's mind—whether this marriage of Marcus Allen's on Christmas Eve could have had anything to do with Jessy's return and her miserable unhappiness. It was only a thought; and she drove it away again. As Abigail said, she had been inclined throughout to judge hardly of Jessy.

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The winter snow lay on the ground still, when it became a question not of how many weeks Jessy would live, but of days. And then she confessed to a secret that pretty nearly changed the sober Miss Pages' hair from black to gray. Jessy had turned Roman Catholic.

It came out through her persistent refusal to see the parson, Mr. Holland, a little man with shaky legs. He'd go trotting up to the Copse Farm once or twice a week; all in vain. Miss Abigail would console him with a good hot jorum of sweet elder wine, and then he'd trot back again. One day Jessy, brought to bay, confessed that she was a Roman Catholic.

There was a grand commotion. John Drench went about, his hands lifted in the frosty air; Abigail and Susan Page sat in the bedroom with (metaphorically speaking) ashes on their heads.

People have their prejudices. It was not so much that these ladies wished to cast reflection on good Catholics born and bred, as that Jessy should have abandoned her own religion, just as though it had been an inadequate faith. It was the slight on it that they could not bear.

"Miserable girl!" exclaimed Miss Susan, looking upon Jessy as a turncoat, and therefore next door to lost. And Jessy told, through her sobs, how it had come to pass.

Wandering about one evening in London when she was very unhappy, she entered a Catholic place of worship styled an "Oratory." The Miss Pages caught up the word as "oratorio," and never called it anything else. There a priest got into conversation with Jessy. He had a pleasant, kind manner that won upon her and drew from her the fact that she was unhappy. Become a Catholic, he said to her: it would bring back her happiness: and he asked her to go and see him again. She went again; again and again. And so, going and listening to him, she at length *did* turn, and was received by him into his Church.

"Are you the happier for it?" sharply asked Miss Abigail.

"No," answered Jessy with distressed eyes. "Only—only—"

"Only what, pray?"

"Well, they can absolve me from all sin."

"Oh, you poor foolish misguided child!" cried Abigail in anguish; "you must take your sins to the Saviour: He can absolve you, and He alone. Do you want any third person to stand between you and Him?"

Jessy gave a sobbing sigh. "It's best as it is, Abigail. Anyway, it is too late now."

"Stop a bit," cried sharp Miss Susan. "I should like to have one thing answered, Jessy. You have told us how hard you were kept to work: if that was so, pray how did you get leisure to be dancing abroad to oratorios? Come?"

Jessy could not, or would not, answer.

"Can you explain that?" said Miss Susan, some sarcasm in her tone.

"I went out sometimes in an evening," faltered Jessy. And more than that could not be drawn from her.

They did not tell Mr. Page: it would have distressed him too much. In a day or two Jessy asked to see a priest. Miss Abigail flatly refused, on account of the scandal. As if their minister was not good enough!

One afternoon I was standing by Jessy's bed—for Miss Abigail had let me go up to see her. Mrs. Todhetley, that first day, had

said she looked like a lily: she was more like one now. A faded lily that has had all its brightness washed out of it.

"Good-bye, Johnny Ludlow," she said, opening her eyes, and putting out her feeble hand. "I shall not see you again."

"I hope you will, Jessy. I'll come over to-morrow."

"Never again in this world." And I had to lean over to catch the words, and my eyes were full.

"In the next world there'll be no parting, Jessy. We shall see each other there."

"I don't know," she said. "You will be there, Johnny; I can't tell whether I shall be. I turned Roman Catholic, you see; and Abigail won't let a priest come. And so—I don't know how it will be."

The words struck upon me. The Miss Pages had kept the secret too closely for news of it to have come abroad. It seemed worse to me to hear it than to her to say it. But she had got too weak to feel things strongly.

"Good-bye, Johnny."

"Good-bye, Jessy dear," I whispered. "Don't fear: God will be sure to take you to Heaven if you ask Him."

Miss Abigail got it out of me—what she had said about the priest. In fact, I told. She was very cross.

"There; let it drop, Johnny Ludlow. John Drench is gone off in the gig to Coughton to bring one. All I hope and trust is, that they'll not be back until the shades of night have fallen to hide the earth! I'd not like a priest to be seen coming into *this* door. Such a reproach on good Mr. Holland! I'm sure I trust it will never get about!"

We all have our prejudices, I repeat. And not a soul amongst us for miles round had found it necessary to change religions since the Reformation.

Evening was well on when John Drench brought him in. A mild-faced man, wearing a skull-cap under his broad-brimmed hat. He saw Jessy alone. Miss Page would not have made a third at the interview though they had bribed her to it—and of course they'd not have had her. It was quite late when he came down. Miss Page stopped him as he was going out, after declining refreshment.

"I presume, sir, she has told you all about this past year—that has been so mysterious to us?"

"Yes; I think all," replied the priest.

"Will you tell me the particulars?"

"I can not do that," he said. "They have been given to me under the seal of confession."

"Only to me and to her sister Susan," pleaded Abigail. "We will not even disclose it to our father. Sir, it would be a true kindness to us, and it can do her no harm. You do not know what our past doubts and distress have been."

But the priest shook his head. He was very sorry to refuse, he said, but the tenets of his Church forbade his speaking. And Miss Page thought he *was* sorry, for he had a benevolent face.

"Best let the past lie," he gently added. "Suffice it to know that she is happy now, poor child, and will die in peace."

They buried her in the church-yard beside her mother. When the secret got about, some said it was not right—that she ought to have been taken elsewhere, to a grave-yard pertaining to the other faith. Which would just have put the finishing stroke on old Page—broken all of his heart there was left to break. The squire said he didn't suppose it mattered in the sight of God: or would make much difference at the Last Day.

And that ended the life of Jessy Page: and, in one sense, its episode of mystery. Nothing more was ever heard or known of where she had been or what she had done. Years have gone by since; and William Page is lying by her. Miss Page and Charley live on at the Copse Farm; Susan has been Mrs. John Drench ages ago. Her husband, a man of substance now, was driving her into Alcester last Tuesday (market-day) in his four-wheeled chaise, two buxom daughters in the back seat. I nodded to them from Mr. Brandon's window.

There's nothing more to tell. The mystery of Jessy Page (as we grew to call it) remained a mystery. It remains one to this day. What the secret was—if there was a secret—why she went in the way she did, and came back in what looked like shame and fear and trembling, a dying girl—has not been solved. It never will be in this world. Some old women put it all down to her having changed her religion and been afraid to tell: while Miss Abigail and Miss Susan have never got rid of a vague doubt, touching Marcus Allen. But it may be only their fancy; they admit that, and say to one another when talking of it privately, that it is not right to judge a man without cause. He keeps a carriage-and-pair now, with servants outside it; and gives dinners, and has handsome daughters growing up; and is altogether grand, quite up to the present style of expensive life in London.

And I never go into church on a Christmas morning—whether it may be decorated in our simple country fashion, green with its branches of holly, or in accordance with your new "artistic" achievements, great in flowers of many colors and tawdry scrolls—but I think of Jessy Page. Of her sweet face, her simplicity, and her want of guile: and of the poor wan wreck that came back, broken-hearted, to die.

CRABB RAVINE.

PART THE FIRST.

THE STRANGE MAN.

"YES! Halloa! What is it?"

To be woke up short by a knocking, or other noise, in the night, is enough to make you start in bed, and stare round in confusion. The room was dark, save for the light that always glimmers in at the window on a summer's night, and I listened and waited for more. Nothing came: it was all as silent as the grave.

We were staying at Crabb Cot. I had gone to bed at half-past nine, dead tired after a day's fishing. The squire and Tod were away; Mrs. Todhetley went over to the Coneys' after tea, and did not seem in a hurry to come back. They fried one of the fish I had caught for my supper; and after that, there being nobody to speak to, I went to bed.

It was a knocking that had woke me out of my sleep: I was sure of that. And it sounded exactly as though it were at the window—which was very improbable. Calling out again to know who was there, and what was wanted—but not very loudly, because the children slept within earshot—and getting no answer, I lay down again, and was all but asleep when the noise came a second time.

It was at the dining-room window, right underneath mine. There could be no mistake. The ceilings of the old-fashioned house were low; the windows were very near each other, and mine was down at the top. I thought it time to jump from the bed, and take a look out.

Well, I was surprised! Instead of its being the middle of the night, it must be quite early still; for the lamp was yet alight in the dining-room. It was a cozy kind of room, with a bow window abutting on the garden, whose middle compartment opened to the ground lengthways, as French windows do. My window was a bow also, and close above the other. Throwing it up, I looked round.

There was not a soul to be seen. And the knocking could not have been from within, because the inside shutters were shut: they did not cover the top panes, and the light of the lamp gleamed through them on the mulberry tree. As I leaned out, wondering, the tinkling old clock at North Crabb church began to tell the hour. I counted the strokes, one by one—ten. Only ten o'clock! And I thought I had been asleep half the night.

All in a moment I caught sight of somebody moving slowly away. He was keeping in the shade; close to the shrubs that encircled the lawn, as if not caring to be seen: a short, thin man, in dark clothes and round black felt hat. Who he was, and what he wanted, was more than I could imagine. It could not be a robber. Robbers don't come to houses with a knock before their people have gone to bed.

The small side-gate gave a bang, and Mrs. Todhetley came in. Old Coney's farm was but a stone's-throw off, and she had run home by herself. We people in the country think nothing of being abroad alone at night. The man emerged from the shade, and put himself right into her path, on the gravel walk. They stood there together. I could see him better now: there was no moon, but the night was light; and it flashed into my mind that he was the same man I had seen Mrs. Todhetley with in the morning, as I went across the fields with my rod and line. She was at the stile, about to descend into the Ravine, when he came up from it, and accosted her. He was a stranger; wearing a seedy, shabby, black coat; and I had wondered what he wanted. They were still talking together when I got out of sight, for I turned to look.

Not for long did they stand now. The gentleman went away; she came scuttering on with her head down, a soft kerchief of wool tied over her cap. In all North Crabb, nobody was so fearful of catching cold in the face as Mrs. Todhetley.

"Who was it?" I called out, when she was underneath the window: which seemed to startle her considerably, for she gave a spring back, right on to the grass.

"Johnny! how you frightened me! What are you looking out at?"

"At that fellow who has just taken himself off. Who is he?"

"I do believe you have got on nothing but your night-shirt! You'll be sure to take cold. Shut the window down, and get into bed."

Four times over, in all, had I to ask about the man before I got an answer. Now it was the night-shirt, now the catching cold, now the open window and the damp air. She always wanted to be as tender over us as though we were chickens.

"The man that met me in the path?" she got to, at length. "He made some excuse for being here: was not sure whose house it was, I think, he said: had turned in by mistake to the wrong one."

"That's all very fine; but, not being sure, he ought to mind his manners. He came rapping at the dining-room window like anything, and it woke me up. Had you been at home, sitting there, good mother, you might have been startled out of your seven senses."

"So I should, Johnny. The Coneys would not let me come away; they had friends with them. Good-night, dear. Shut down that window."

She went on to the side-door. I shut the window down, opened it at the top, and let the white curtain drop before it. It was an hour or two before I got to sleep, and had the man and the knocking in my thoughts all the while.

"Don't say anything about it in the house, Johnny," Mrs. Tod-

hetley said to me, in the morning. "It might alarm the children." So I promised her I would not.

Tod came home at midday, not the squire: and the first thing I did was to tell him. I'd not have broken faith with the mother for the world; not even for Tod; but it never entered my mind that she wished me to keep it an entire secret, except from those, servants or others, who might be likely to repeat it before Hugh and Lena. I cautioned Tod.

"Confound his impudence!" cried Tod. "Could he not be satisfied with disturbing the house by the door at night, but he must make it the window? I wish I had been at home."

Crabb Ravine lay to the side of our house, beyond the wide field. It was a regular wilderness. The sharp descent began in that three-cornered grove, of which you've heard before, for it was where Daniel Ferrar hung himself; and the wild, deep, mossy dell, about as wide as an ordinary road, went running along below, soft, and green, and damp. Towering banks, sloping backward, rose on either side; a mass of verdure in summer; of briers, brown and tangled, in winter. Dwarf shrubs, tall trees, blackberry and nut bushes, sweet-brier and broom clustered there in wild profusion. Primroses and violets peeped up when spring came in; blue bells and cowslips, dog-roses, woodbine, and lots more sweet flowers, came later. Few people would descend except by the stile opposite our house and the proper zigzag path leading down the side bank, for a fall might have snapped limbs, besides bringing one's pantaloons to grief. No houses stood near it, except ours and old Coney's; and the field bordering it just here on this side belonged to Squire Todhetley. If you went down the zigzag path, turned to the right, walked along the Ravine some way, and then up another zigzag on the opposite side, you came soon to Timberdale, a small place in itself, but our nearest post-town. The high-road to Timberdale, winding past our house from South Crabb, was double the distance, so that people might sometimes be seen in the Ravine by day; but nobody cared to go near it at evening, as it had the reputation of being haunted. A mysterious light might sometimes be observed there at night, dodging itself about the banks, where it would be rather difficult for human legs to walk: some said it was a will-o'-the-wisp, and some said a ghost. It was a regular difficulty to get even a farm servant to go the near way to Timberdale after dark.

One morning, when I was running through the Ravine with Tod in search of Tom Coney, we came slap against a man, who seemed to be sneaking there, for he turned short off, amidst the underwood, to hide himself. I knew him by his hat.

"Tod, that's the man," I whispered.

"What man? He from the moon, Johnny?"

"The one that came knocking at the window three nights ago."

"Oh!" said Tod, carelessly. "He looks like a fellow who comes out with begging petitions."

It might have been an hour after that. We had come up from the Ravine, on our side of it, not having seen or spoken to a soul, except Luke Mackintosh. Tod told me to stay and waylay Coney if he made his appearance, while he went again to the farm in search of him. Accordingly, I was sitting on the fence (put there

to hinder the cattle and sheep from getting over the brink of the Ravine), throwing stones and whistling, when I saw Mrs. Todhetley cross the stile to go down the zigzag. She did not see me: the fence could hardly be got to for trees, and I was hidden.

Just because I had nothing to do, I watched her as she went; tall, thin, and light in figure, she could spin along nearly as quick as we. The zigzag path went in and out, sloping along sideways on the bank until it brought itself to the dell at a spot a good bit beyond me as I looked down, finishing there with a high, rough step. Mrs. Todhetley took it with a spring.

What next? In one moment the man with the black coat and hat had appeared from somewhere, and put himself in front of her parasol. Before I could quit the place, and leap down after her, a conviction took me that the meeting was not accidental: and I rubbed my eyes in wonder, and thought I must be dreaming.

The summer air was clear as crystal; not a bee's hum just then disturbed its stillness. Detached words ascended from where they stood; and now and again a whole sentence. She kept looking each way as if afraid to be seen; and so did he, for that matter. The colloquy seemed to be about money. I caught the word two or three times; and Mrs. Todhetley said it was "impossible." "I must, and I will have it," came up distinctly from him in answer.

"What's *that*, Johnny?"

The interruption came from Tod. All my attention absorbed in them, he stood at my elbow before I knew he was near. When I would have answered, he suddenly put his hand upon my mouth for silence. His face had a proud anger on it, as he looked down.

Mrs. Todhetley seemed to be using entreaty to the man, for she clasped her hands in a piteous manner, and then turned to ascend the zigzag. He followed her, talking very fast. As to me, I was in a regular sea of marvel, understanding nothing. Our heads were amidst the bushes, hardly to be distinguished from them, even if she had looked up.

"No," she said, turning round upon him; and they were near us then, half-way up the path, so that every word was audible. "You must not venture to come to the house, or near the house. I would not have Mr. Todhetley know of this for the world: for your sake as well as his."

"Todhetley's not at home," was the man's answer: and Tod gave a growl as he heard it.

"If he is not, his son is," said Mrs. Todhetley. "It would be all the same; or worse."

"His son's here," roared out passionate Tod. "What the deuce is the meaning of this, sir?"

The man shot down the path like an arrow. Mrs. Todhetley—who had been walking on, seeming not to have caught the words, or to know whose the voice was, or where it came from—gazed round in all directions, her countenance curiously helpless. She ran up the rest of the zigzag, and went swiftly home across the field. Tod disentangled himself from the brambles, and drew a long breath.

"I think it's time that we went now, Johnny."

It was not often he spoke in that tone. He had always been at

war tacitly with Mrs. Todhetley, and was not likely to favor her now. Generous though he was by nature, there could be no denying that he took up awful prejudices.

"It is something about money, Tod."

"I don't care what it is about—the fellow has no business to be prowling here, on my father's grounds; and he *sha'n't* be, without my knowing what it's for. I'll watch madam's movements."

"What do you think it can mean?"

"Mean! Why, that the individual is some poor relation of hers, come to drain as much of my father's money out of her as he can. *She* is the one to blame. I wonder how she dare encourage him!"

"Perhaps she can't help herself."

"Not help herself? Don't show yourself a fool, Johnny. An honest-minded, straightforward woman would appeal to my father in any annoyance of this sort, or to me in his absence, and say 'Here's so-and-so come down upon us asking for help, can we give it him?'—and there's no doubt the squire *would* give it him; he's soft enough for anything."

It was of no use contending. I did not see it in quite that light but Tod liked his own opinion. He flung up his head with a haughty jerk.

"You have tried to defend Mrs. Todhetley before, in trifling matters, Johnny; don't attempt it now. Would any good woman, say any *lady*, if you will, subject herself to this kind of thing?—hold private meetings with a man—allow him to come tapping at her sitting-room window at night? No; not though he were her own brother."

"Tod, it may be her brother. She'd not do anything wrong willingly."

"Shut up, Johnny. She never had a brother."

Of course I shut up forthwith, and went across the field by Tod's side in silence, his strides wide enough for ten indignant men, his head aloft in the air. Mrs. Todhetley was hearing Lena read when we got in, and looked as if she had never been abroad that morning.

Some days went on. The man remained near, for he was seen occasionally, and the servants began to talk. One remarked upon him, wondering who he was; another remarked upon him, speculating on what he did there. In a quiet country place, a dodging stranger excites curiosity, and this one dodged about as much as ever the ghost's light did. If you caught sight of him in the three-cornered plantation, he'd vanish forthwith to appear next in the Ravine; if he stood peering out from the trees on the bank, and found himself observed, the next minute he'd be stooping amid the thick broom on the other side.

This came to be observed, and was thought strange, naturally. Hannah, who was often out with Hugh and Lena, saw him mostly, and she talked to the other servants. One evening, when we were finishing dinner, the glass doors of the bow-window being open, Hannah came back with the children. They ran across the grass-plat after the fawn—one we had, just then—and Hannah sat down in the porch of the side-door to wait. Old Thomas had just drawn

the slips from the table, and went through the passage to the side-door to shake them.

"I say," cried Hannah's voice, "I saw that man again."

"Where?" asked Thomas, between his shakes of the linen, which we could hear distinctly.

"In the old place—the Ravine. He was sitting on the stile at the top of the zigzag, as cool as might be."

"Did you speak to him? I should, if I came across the man; and ask what his business might be in these parts."

"I didn't speak to him," returned Hannah. "I'd rather not. There's no knowing the answer one might get, Thomas, or what it is he's looking after. He spoke to the children."

"What did he say to them?"

"Asked if they'd go away with him to some beautiful coral islands over the sea, and catch pretty birds, and parrots, and monkeys. He called them by their names, too—'Hugh' and 'Lena.' I should like to know how he got hold of *them*."

"I can't help thinking that he belongs to them engineering folks who come spying for no good on people's land; the squire won't like it if they cut a railroad through here," said Thomas, and the supposition did not appear to please Hannah.

"Why, you must be as silly as a gobbling turkey, old Thomas! Engineers have no need to hide themselves as if they were afraid of being took up for murder. He has got about as much the cut of an engineer as you have, and no more; they don't go about looking like Methodist parsons run to seed. *My* opinion is that he's something of that sort."

"A Methodist parson!"

"No; not anything half so respectable. If I spoke out my thoughts, though, I dare say you'd laugh at me."

"Not I," said Thomas. "Make haste. I forgot to put the claret jug on the table."

"Then I've got it in my head that he is one of them seducing Mormons. They appear in neighborhoods without the smallest warning, lie there partly concealed by day, and go abroad at night persuading all the likely women and girls to join their sect. My sister told me about it in a letter she wrote me only three days ago. There has been a Mormon down there; he called himself a saint, she says; and when he went finally away he took fifteen young women with him. Fifteen, Thomas! and after only three weeks' persuasion! It's as true as that you've got that damask cloth in your hand."

Nothing further was heard for a minute. Then Thomas spoke. "Has the man here been seen talking with young women?"

"Who is to know? They take care *not* to be seen; that's their craft. And so you see, Thomas, I'd rather steer clear of the man, and not give him the opportunity of trying his arts on me. I can tell him it's not Hannah Baber that would be cajoled off to a barbarous desert at the tail of a man who had got fifteen other wives besides!—Lord help the women for geese! Miss Lena! (raising her voice to a scream), "don't you tear about after the fawn like that; you'll put yourself into a pretty heat."

"I'd look him up when I came home, if I were the squire," said

Thomas, who evidently took it all gravely in. "We don't want a Mormon on the place."

"If he were not a Mormon, which I'm pretty sure he is, I should say he was a kidnapper of children," went on Hannah. "After we had got past him ever so far he managed to 'tice Hugh back to him at the stile, gave him a sugar-stick, and said he'd take him away if he'd go. It struck me he'd like to kidnap him. Miss Lena, then, I won't have it! look at your hat on the grass. You'll get a face like the full moon."

Tod, sitting at the foot of the table in the squire's place, had listened to all this deliberately, showing that he listened. Mrs. Todhetley, opposite to him, her back to the light, had tried, in a feeble manner, once or twice, to drown the sounds by saying something. But when urgently wanting to speak we often can't; and her efforts died away helplessly. She looked miserably uncomfortable; she seemed conscious of Tod's feeling in the matter; and when Hannah wound up with the bold assertion touching the kidnapping of Hugh, she gave a start of alarm, which left her face white.

"Who is this man that shows himself in the neighborhood?" asked Tod, putting the question to her in a slow, marked manner, his dark eyes, stern then, fixed on hers.

"Johnny, those cherries don't look ripe. Try the summer apples."

It was of no use at any time trying to put aside Tod. Before I had answered her that the cherries were ripe enough for me, Tod began at her again.

"Can you tell me who he is?"

"Dear me, no," she faintly said. "I can't tell you anything about it."

"Nor what he wants?"

"No. Won't you take some wine, Joseph?"

"I shall make it my business to inquire, then," said Tod, disregarding the wine and everything else. "The first time I come across the man, unless he gives me a perfectly satisfactory answer as to what he may be doing here on our land, I'll horsewhip him." Mrs. Todhetley put the trembling fingers of her left hand into the finger-glass, and dried them. I don't believe she knew what she was about more than a baby.

"The man is nothing to you, Joseph. Why should you interfere with him?"

"I shall interfere because my father is not here to do it," he answered, in his least compromising tones. "An ill-looking stranger has no right to be prowling mysteriously amid us at all. But when it comes to knocking at windows at night, to waylaying—people—in solitary places, and to exciting comments from the servants, it is time somebody interfered to know the reason of it."

I am sure he had been going to say *you;* but with all his prejudice he never was insolent to Mrs. Todhetley, when face to face; and he substituted "people." Her pale blue eyes had the saddest light in them you can well conceive, and yet she tried to look as though the matter did not concern her. Old Thomas came in with the folded damask slips, little thinking he and Hannah had been overheard, put them in the drawer, and set things straight on the sideboard.

"What time tea, ma'am?" he asked.

"Any time," answered Mrs. Todhetley. "I am going over to Mr. Coney's, but not to stay. Or perhaps you'll go for me presently, Johnny, and ask whether Mrs. Coney has come home," she added, as Thomas left the room.

I said I'd go. And it struck me that she must want Mrs. Coney very particularly, for this would make the fifth time I had gone on the same errand within a week. On the morning following that rapping at the window Mrs. Coney got news that Mrs. West, her married daughter, was ill, and she started at once by the rail to Worcester to visit her.

"I think I'll go and look for the fellow now," exclaimed Tod, rising from his seat and making for the window. But Mrs. Todhetley rose too, like one in mortal fright, and put herself in his way.

"Joseph," she said, "I have no authority over you; you know that I have never attempted to exercise any since I came home to your father's house; but I must ask you to respect my wishes now."

"What wishes?"

"That you will refrain from seeking this stranger; that you will not speak to or accost him in any way, should you and he by chance meet. I have good reasons for asking it." Tod stood stock-still, neither saying Yes nor No; only biting his lips in the anger he strove to keep down.

"Oh, very well," said he, going back to his seat. "Of course, as you put it in this light, I have no alternative. A night's delay can not make much difference, and my father will be home to-morrow to act for himself."

"You must not mention it to your father, Joseph. You must keep it *from* him."

"I shall tell him as soon as he comes home."

"Tell him what? What is it that you suspect? What would you tell him?"

Tod hesitated. He had spoken in random heat; and found, on consideration, he was without a case. He could not complain to his father of *her;* in spite of his hasty temper he was honorable as the day. Her apparent intimacy with the man would also tie his tongue as to *him*, whomsoever he might be.

"You must be quite aware that it is not a pleasant thing, or a proper thing, to have this mysterious individual encouraged here," he said, looking at her.

"And you think I encourage him, Joseph?"

"Well, it seems that you—that you must know who he is. I saw you talking with him one day in the Ravine," continued Tod, disdaining not to be perfectly open, now it had come to an explanation. "Johnny was with me. If he is a relative of yours, why, of course—"

"He is no relative of mine, Joseph." And Tod opened his eyes wide to hear the denial. It was the view he had taken all along.

"Then why do you suffer him to annoy you?—and I am sure he does do it. Let me deal with him. I'll soon ascertain what his business may be."

"But that is just what you must not do," she said, seeming to speak out the truth in very helplessness, like a frightened child,

"You must please leave him in my hands, Joseph; I shall be able, I dare say, to—to—get rid of him shortly."

"*You* know what he wants?"

"Yes, I am afraid I do. It is quite my affair; and you must take no more notice of it; above all, you must not say anything to our father."

How much Tod was condemning her in his heart perhaps he'd not have cared to tell; but he could but be generous, even to his step-mother.

"I suppose I must understand that you are in some kind of trouble?"

"Indeed I am."

"If it is anything in which I can help you, you have but to ask me to do it," he said. But his manner was lofty as he spoke, his voice had a hard ring in it.

"Thank you very much, Joseph," was the meek, grateful answer. "If you will only take no further notice, and say nothing to your father when he comes home, it will be sufficiently helping me."

Tod strolled out, just as angry as he could be: and I ran over to the Farm. Jane Coney had got a letter from her mother by the afternoon post, saying she might not be home for some days to come.

"Tell Mrs. Todhetley that I am sorry to have to send her bad news over and over again," said Jane Coney, who was sitting in the best kitchen, with her muslin sleeves turned up, and a big apron on, stripping fruit for jam. The Coneys had brought up their girls sensibly, not to be ashamed to make themselves thoroughly useful, in spite of their good education, and the fair fortune they'd have. Mary was married; Jane engaged to be. I sat on the table by her, eating away at the fruit.

"What is it that Mrs. Todhetley wants with my mother, Johnny?"

"As if I knew!"

"I think it must be something urgent. When she came in, that morning, only five minutes after mamma had driven off, she was so terribly disappointed, saying she would give a great deal to have spoken to her first. My sister is not quite so well again; that's why mamma is staying longer."

"I'll tell her, Jane."

"By the way, Johnny, what's this they are saying—about some strange man being seen here? A special constable, peeping after bad characters?"

"A special constable?"

Jane Coney laughed. "Or a police officer in disguise It is what one of our maids told me."

"Oh," I answered, carelessly, for somehow I did not like the words; "you must mean a man that is looking at the land; an engineer."

"Is that all?" cried Jane Coney. "How foolish people are!"

It was a kind of untruth, no doubt; but I should have told a worse in the necessity. I did not like the aspect of things; and they puzzled my brain unpleasantly all the way home.

Mrs. Todhetley was at work by the window when I got there.

Tod had not made his reappearance; Hugh and Lena were in bed. She dropped her work when I gave the message.

"Not for some days to come yet! Oh, Johnny!"

"But what do you want with her?"

"Well, I do want her. I want a friend just now, Johnny, that's the truth; and I think Mrs. Coney would be one."

"Joe asked if he could help you; and you said 'No.' Can I?"

"Johnny, if you could, there's no one in the world I'd rather ask. But you can not."

"Why?"

"Because"—she smiled for a moment—"you are not old enough. If you were—of age, say—why then I would."

I had hold of the window-frame, looking at her, and an idea struck me. "Do you mean that I should be able then to command money?"

"Yes, that's it, Johnny."

"But, perhaps—if I were to write to Mr. Brandon—"

"Hush!" she exclaimed in a kind of fright. "You must not talk of this, Johnny; you don't know the sad mischief you might do. Oh, if I can but keep it from you all! Here comes Joseph," she added in a whisper; and gathering up her work, went out of the room.

"Did I not make a sign to you to come after me?" began Tod, in one of his tempers.

"But I had to go over to the Coneys'. I've only just got back."

He looked into the room and saw that it was empty. "Where's madam gone? To the Ravine after her friend?"

"She was here sewing not a minute ago."

"Johnny, she told a lie. Did you notice the sound of her voice when she said the fellow was no relative of hers?"

"Not particularly."

"I did, then. At the moment the denial took me by surprise; but I remembered the tone later. It had an untrue ring in it. Madam told a lie, Johnny, as sure as that we are here: I'd lay my life he *is* a relative of hers, or a connection in some way. I don't think now it is money he wants; if it were only that, she'd get it, and send him packing. It's worse than that: disgrace, perhaps."

"What sort of disgrace can it be?"

"I don't know. But if something of the sort is not looming, never trust me again. And here am I, with my hands tied, forbidden to unravel it. Johnny, I feel just like a wild beast barred up in a cage."

Had he been a real wild beast he could not have given the window-frame a much worse shake, as he passed through in his anger to the bench under the mulberry-tree.

When you have to look far back to things, the recollection sometimes gets puzzled as to the order in which they happened. How it came about I am by no means clear, but an uncomfortable feeling grew up in my mind about Hugh. About both the children, in fact, but Hugh more than Lena. Mrs. Todhetley seemed to dread Hugh's being abroad—and I'm sure I was not mistaken in thinking it. I heard her order Hannah to keep the children within view of the house, and not to allow Hugh to stray away from her. Had it

been winter weather I suppose she'd have kept them in-doors entirely; there could be no plea for it under the blue sky and the hot summer sun.

The squire came home; he had been staying some time with friends in Gloucestershire; but Mrs. Coney did not come—although Mrs. Todhetley kept sending me for news. Twice I saw her talking to the strange man; who I believed made his abode in the Ravine. Tod watched, as he had threatened to do; and would often appear with drawn-in lips. There was active warfare between him and his step-mother: at least if you can say that when both kept silence. As to the squire, he observed nothing, and knew nothing; and nobody enlightened him. It seems a long while, I dare say, when reading of this, as if it had extended over a month of Sundays; but I don't think it lasted much more than a fortnight in all.

One evening, quite late, when the sun was setting, and the squire was smoking his pipe on the lawn, talking to me and Tod, Lena and her mother came in at the gate. In spite of the red rays lighting up Mrs. Todhetley's face, it struck me that I had never seen it look more careworn. Lena put her arms on Tod's knee, and began telling about a fright she had had; of a big toad that leaped out of the grass, and made her scream and cry. She cried "because nobody was with her."

"Where was mamma?" asked Tod; but I am sure he spoke without any ulterior thought.

"Mamma had gone to the zigzag stile to talk to the man. She told me to wait for her."

"What man?" cried the squire.

"Why the man," said Lena, logically. "He asks Hugh to go with him over the sea to see the birds and the red coral."

If any one face ever turned whiter than another, Mrs. Todhetley's did then. Tod looked at her sternly, ungenerously; and her eyes fell. She laid hold of Lena's hand, saying it was bed-time.

"What man is the child talking about?" the squire asked her.

"She talks about so many people," rather faintly answered Mrs. Todhetley. "Come, Lena, dear; Hannah's waiting for you. Say good-night."

The squire, quite unsuspicious, thought no more. He got up and walked over to the beds to look at the flowers, holding his long churchwarden's pipe in his mouth. Tod put his back against the tree.

"It is getting complicated, Johnny."

"What is?"

"What is! Why madam's drama. She is afraid of that hinted-at scheme of her friend's—the carrying-off Master Hugh beyond the seas."

He spoke in satire. "Do you think so?" I returned.

"Upon my word and honor I do. She must be an idiot! I should like to give her a good fright."

"Tod, I think she is frightened enough without our giving her one."

"I think she is. She must have caught up the idea from overhearing Hannah's gossip with old Thomas. This afternoon Hugh was running through the little gate with me; madam came flying

over the lawn and begged me not to let him out of my hand, or else to leave him in-doors. But for being my father's wife, I should have asked her if her common-sense had gone wool-gathering."

"I suppose it has, Tod. Fancy a kidnapper in these days! The curious thing is, that she should fear anything of the sort."

"If she really does fear it. I tell you, Johnny, the performance is growing complicated; somewhat puzzling. But I'll see it played out if I live."

The week went on to Friday. But the afternoon was over, and evening set in, before the shock fell upon us: *Hugh was missing.*

The squire had been out in the gig, taking me; and it seems they had supposed at home that Hugh was with us. The particulars of Hugh's disappearance, and what had happened in the day, I will relate further on.

The squire thought nothing: he said Hugh must have got into Coney's house or some other neighbor's house; and sat down to dinner, wondering why so much to-do was made. Mrs. Todhetley looked scared to death; and Tod tore about as if he were wild. The servants were sent here; the out door men yonder: it was like a second edition of that day in Warwickshire when we lost Lena: like it, only worse, more of commotion. Hannah boldly said to her mistress that the strange man must have carried off the boy.

Hour after hour the search continued. With no result. Night came on, and a bright moon to light it up. But it did not light up Hugh.

Mrs. Todhetley, a dark shawl over her head, and I dare say a darker fear over her heart, went out for the second or third time toward the Ravine. I ran after her. We had nearly reached the stile at the zigzag, when Tod came bounding over it.

"Has not the time for shielding this man gone by, think you?" he asked, placing himself in Mrs. Todhetley's path, and speaking as coolly as he was able for the agitation that shook him. And why Tod, with his known carelessness, should be so moved, I could not fathom.

"Joseph, I do not suppose or think the man knows anything of Hugh; I have my reasons for it," she answered, bearing on for the stile, and leaning over it to look down into the Ravine's darkness.

"Will you give me permission to inquire that of himself?"

"You will not find the man. He is gone."

"Leave the finding him to me," persisted Tod. "Will you withdraw the embargo you laid upon me?"

"No, no," she whispered, "I can not do it."

The trees had an uncommonly damp feel in the night-air, and the place altogether looked as weird as could be. I was away then in the underwood; she looked down always into the Ravine and called Hugh's name aloud. Nothing but echo answered.

"It has appeared to me for several days that you have feared something of this," Tod said, trying to get a full view of her face. "It might have been better for—for all of us—if you had allowed me at first to take the affair in hand."

"Perhaps I ought; perhaps I ought," she said, bursting into tears. "Heaven knows, though, that I acted from a good motive.

It was not to screen myself that I've tried to keep the matter secret."

"Oh!"

The mocking sarcasm of Tod's short comment was like nothing I ever heard.

"To screen me, perhaps?" said he.

"Well, yes—in a measure, Joseph," she patiently said. "I only wished to spare you vexation. Oh, Joseph! if—if Hugh can not be found, and—and all has to come out—who he is and what he wants here—remember that I wished nothing but to spare others pain."

Tod's eyes were ablaze with angry, haughty light. Spare *him!* He thought she was miserably equivocating; he had some such idea as that she sought (in words) to make him a scape-goat for her relative's sins. What he answered I hardly know; except that he civilly dared her to speak.

"Do not spare *me:* I particularly request you will not," he scornfully retorted. "Yourself as much as you will, but not me."

"I have done it for the best," she pleaded. "Joseph, I have done it all for the best."

"Where is this man to be found? I have been looking for him these several hours past, as I should think no man was ever looked for yet."

"I have said I think he is not to be found. I think he is gone."

"Gone!" shrieked Tod. "Gone!"

"I think he must be. I—I saw him just before dinner-time, here at this very stile; I gave him something that I had to give, and I think he left at once, to make the best of his way from the place"

"And Hugh?" asked Tod, savagely.

"I did not know then that Hugh was missing. Oh, Joseph, I can't tell what to think. When I said to him one day that he ought not to talk nonsense to the children about corals and animals—in fact, should not speak to them at all—he answered that if I did not get him the money he wanted he'd take the boy off with him. I knew it was a jest; but I could not help thinking of it when the days went on and on, and I had no money to give him."

"*Of course* he has taken the boy," said Tod, stamping his foot. And the words sent Mrs. Todhetley into a tremble.

"Joseph! Do you think so?"

"Heaven help you, Mrs. Todhetley, for a—simple woman! We may never see Hugh again."

He caught up the word he had been going to say—fool. Mrs. Todhetley clasped her hands together with a piteous groan, and the shawl slipped off her shoulders.

"I think, madam, you must tell what you can," he resumed, scarcely knowing which to let come uppermost, his anxiety for Hugh or his lofty scornful anger. "*Is* the man a relative of yours?"

"No, not of mine. Oh, Joseph, please don't be angry with me! not of mine, but of yours."

"Of mine!" cried proud Tod. "Thank you, Mrs. Todhetley."

"His name is Arne," she whispered.

"What!" shouted Tod.

"Joseph, indeed it is. Alfred Arne."

Had Tod been shot by a cannon-ball, he could hardly have been more completely struck into himself; doubled up, so to say. His mother had been an Arne; and he well remembered to have heard of an ill-doing, mauvais sujet of a half-brother of hers, called Alfred, who brought nothing but trouble and disgrace on all connected with him. There ensued a silence, broken only by Mrs. Todhetley's tears. Tod was looking white in the moonlight.

"So it seems it is my affair!" he suddenly said; but though he drew up his head till he looked as tall as the alder-tree under which they stood, all his fierce spirit seemed to have gone out of him. "You can have no objection to speak fully now."

And Mrs. Todhetley, partly because of her unresisting nature, partly in her fear for Hugh, obeyed him.

"I had seen Mr. Arne once before," she began. "It was the same year that I first went home to Dyke Manor. He made his appearance there, not openly, but just as he has made it here now. His object was to get money from the squire to go abroad with. And at length he did get it. But it put your father very much out; made him ill, in fact; and I believe he took a kind of vow, in his haste and vexation, to give Alfred Arne into custody if he ever came within reach of him again. I think—I fear—he always has something or other hanging over his head worse than debt; and for that reason can never show himself by daylight without danger."

"Go on," said Tod, quite calmly.

"One morning recently I suddenly met him. He stepped right into my path, here at this same spot, as I was about to descend the Ravine, and asked if I knew him again. I was afraid I did. I was afraid he had come on the same errand as before: and oh, Joseph, how thankful I felt that you and your father were away! He told me a long and pitiful tale, and I thought I ought to try and help him to the money he needed. He was impatient for it, and the same evening, supposing no one was at home but myself, he came to the dining-room window, wishing to ask if I had already procured the money. Johnny heard him knock."

"It might have been better that we had been here," repeated Tod. "Better that we should have dealt with him than you."

"Your father was so thankful that you were at school before, Joseph; so thankful! He said he would not have you know anything about Alfred Arne for the world. And so—I tried to keep it this time from both you and him, and, but for this fear about Hugh, I should have done it."

Tod did not answer. He looked at her keenly in the light of the summer's night, apparently waiting for more. She continued her explanation, not enlarging upon things, suffering, rather, inferences to be drawn. The following was its substance:

Alfred Arne asked for fifty pounds. He had returned to England only a few months, had got into some fresh danger, and had to leave it again, and to hide himself until he did so. The fifty pounds —to get him off, he said, and start him afresh in the colonies—he demanded not as a gift, but a matter of right: the Todhetleys, being his near relatives, must help him. Mrs. Todhetley knew but of one

person she could borrow it from privately—Mrs. Coney—and *she* had gone from home just as she was about to be asked for it. Only this afternoon had Mrs. Todhetley received the money from her and paid it to Alfred Arne.

"I would not have told you this, but for being obliged, Joseph," she pleaded meekly, when the brief explanation was ended. "We can still keep it from your father; better, perhaps, that you should know it than he: you are young and he is not."

"A great deal better," assented Tod. "You have made yourself responsible to Mrs. Coney for the fifty pounds?"

"Don't think of that, Joseph. She is in no hurry for repayment, and will get it from me by degrees. I have a little trifle of my own, you know, that I get half-yearly, and I can pinch in my clothes. I did so hope to keep it from you as well as from your father."

I wondered if Tod saw all the patient, generous, self-sacrificing spirit. I wondered if he was growing to think that he had been always on the wrong tack in judging harshly of his step-mother. She turned away thinking perhaps that time was being lost. I said something about Hugh.

"Hugh is all right, Johnny; he'll be found now," Tod answered in a dreamy tone, as he looked after her with a dreamy look. The next moment he strode forward, and was up with Mrs. Todhetley.

"I beg your pardon for the past, mother; I beg it with shame and contrition. Can you forgive me?"

"Oh, pray don't, dear Joseph! I have nothing to forgive," she answered, bursting into fresh tears as she took his offered hand. And that was the first time in all his life that Tod, prejudiced Tod, had allowed himself to call her "mother."

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PART THE SECOND.

TOD'S REPENTANCE.

I NEVER saw anything plainer in my life. It was not just opposite to where I stood, but lower down toward the end of the Ravine. Amidst the dark thick underwood of the rising bank it dodged about, just as if somebody who was walking carried it in his hand lifted up in front of him. A round white light, exactly as the ghost's light was described to be. One might have fancied it the light of a wax-candle, only that a candle would flicker itself dim and bright by turns in the current of air, and this was steady and did not.

If a ghost was carrying it, he must have been pacing backward and forward; for the light confined itself to the range of a few yards. Beginning at the environs of the black old yew-tree, it would come on amidst the broom and shrubs to the group of alders, and then go back again Timberdale way, sometimes lost to sight for a minute, as if hidden behind a thicker mass of underwood, and then gleaming out afresh further on in its path. Now

up, now down; backward and forward; here, there, everywhere; it was about as droll and unaccountable a sight as any veritable ghost ever displayed, or I, Johnny Ludlow, had chanced to come upon.

The early part of the night had been bright. It was the same night, spoken of in the last chapter, when Hugh was being searched for. Up to eleven o'clock the moon had shone radiantly. Since then a curious kind of darkness had come creeping along the heavens, and now, close upon twelve, it overshadowed the earth like a pall. A dark, black canopy, which the slight wind, getting up, never stirred, though it sighed and moaned with a weird unpleasant sound down the Ravine. I did not mind the light myself, don't think I should much have minded the ghost: but Luke Mackintosh, standing by me, did. Considering that he was a good five-and-twenty years of age, and had led an out-of-door life, it may sound queer to say it, but he seemed timid as a hare.

"I don't like it, Master Johnny," he whispered, as he grasped hold of the fence with a shaking hand, and followed the light with his eyes. What with the trees around us, and the pall overhead, it was dark enough, but I could see his face, and knew it had turned white.

"I believe you are afraid, Luke!"

"Well, sir, so might you be if you knowed as much of that there light as I do. It never comes but it bodes trouble."

"Who brings the light?"

"It's more than I can say, sir. They call it here the ghost's light. And folks say, Master Johnny, that when it's seen, there's sure to be some bad trouble in the air."

"I think we have got trouble enough just now without the light, Luke; and our trouble was with us before we saw that."

The Ravine lay beneath us, stretching out on either hand, weird, lonesome, dreary, the bottom of it hidden in gloom. The towering banks, whether we looked down the one we leaned over, or to the other opposite, presented nothing to the eye but darkness: we knew the masses of trees, bushes, underwood were there, but could not see them: and the spot favored by the restless light was too wild and steep to be safe for the foot of man. Of course it was a curious speculation what it could be.

"Did you ever see the light before, Mackintosh?"

"Yes," he answered, "half a dozen times. Do you mind, Master Johnny, my getting that there bad cut in the leg with my reaping-hook awhile agone? Seven weeks I lay in Worcester Infirmary: they carried me there on a mattress shoved down in the cart."

"I remember hearing of it. We were at Dyke Manor."

Before Luke went on, he turned his face to me and dropped his voice to a deeper whisper. The man seemed scared three parts out of his senses.

"Master Ludlow, as true as us two be a standing here, I saw the ghost's light the very night afore I got the hurt. I was working for Mr. Coney then; it was before I came into the squire's service. Young Master Tom, he came out of the kitchen with a letter when we was at our seven o'clock supper, and said I were to cut off to Timberdale with it and to look sharp, or the letter-box 'ud be shut. So I had to do it, sir, and I came through this here Ravine,

a-whistling and a-holding of my head down, though I'd rather ha' went ten mile round. When I got out of it on t'other side, on top of the zigzag, I chanced to look back over the stile, and there I see the light. It were opposite then, on *this* side, sir, and moving about in the same see-saw way it be now, for I stood and watched it."

"I wonder you plucked up the courage to stand and watch it, Luke?"

"I were took aback, sir; were all in a maze like; and then I started off full pelt, as quick as my heels 'ud carry me. That was the very blessed night afore I got the hurt. When the doctors was a-talking round me at the infirmary, and I think they was a-arguing whether or not my leg must come off, I telled 'em that I was afeared it wouldn't much matter neither way, for I'd seen the ghost's light the past night and knowed my fate. One of them, a young man he were, burst out laughing above my face as I lay, and the t'other next him, a grave gentleman with white hair, turned round and hushed at him. Master Ludlow, it's all gospel true."

"But you got well, Luke."

"But I didn't think to," argued Luke. "And I see the light."

As he turned his face again, the old church clock at Timberdale struck twelve. It seemed to come booming over the Ravine with quite a warning sound, and Luke gave himself a shake. As for me, I could only wish one thing—that Hugh was found.

Tod came up the zigzag path, a lantern in his hand; I whistled to let him know I was near. He had been to look in the unused little shed-place nearly at the other end of the Ravine; not for Hugh, but for the man, Alfred Arne. Tod came up to us, and his face, as the lantern flashed upon it, was whiter and graver than that of Luke Mackintosh.

"Did you see that, sir?" asked Luke.

"See what?" cried Tod, turning with eager sharpness. He thought it might be some trace of Hugh.

"That there ghost's light, sir. It's showing of itself to-night."

Angry, perplexed, nearly out of his mind with remorse and fear, Tod gave Luke a word of a sort, ordering him to be silent for an idiot, and put the lantern down. He then saw the moving light, and let his eyes rest on it in momentary curiosity.

"It's the ghost's light, sir," repeated Luke, for the man seemed as if he and all other interests were lost in that.

"The deuce take the ghost's light, and you with it," said Tod passionately. "Is this a time to be staring at ghost's lights? Get you into Timberdale, Mackintosh, and see whether the police have got news of the child."

"Master, I'd not go through the Ravine to-night," was Luke's answer. "No, not though I knowed I was to be killed at to-morrow's dawn for disobeying of the order."

"Man, what are you afraid of?"

"Of that," said Luke, nodding at the light. "But I don't like the Ravine in the night at no time."

"Why, that's nothing but a will-o'-the-wisp," returned Tod, condescending to reason with him.

Luke shook his head. There was the light; and neither his faith

in it nor his fear could be shaken. Tod had his arms on the fence now, and was staring at the light as fixedly as Luke had done.

"Johnny"

"What?"

"That light is carried by some one. It's being lifted about."

"How could any one carry it *there?*" I returned. "He'd pitch head over heels down the Ravine. No fellow could get to the place, Tod, let alone keep his footing. It's where the bushes are thickest."

Tod caught up the lantern. As its light flashed on his face, I could see it working with new eagerness. He was taking up the notion that Hugh might have fallen on that very spot, and that somebody was waving a light to attract attention. As to ghosts, Tod would have met an army of them without the smallest fear.

He went back down the Ravine, and we heard him go crashing through the underwood. Luke never spoke a word. All on a sudden, long before Tod could get to it, the light disappeared. We waited and watched, but it did not come again.

"It have been like that always, Master Johnny," whispered Luke, taking his arms off the fence. "Folks may look as long as they will at that there light; but as soon as they go off, a-trying to see what it is, it takes itself away. It will be seen no more to-night, sir."

He turned off across the meadow for the high road, to go and do Tod's bidding at Timberdale, walking at a sharp pace. Any amount of exertion would have been welcome to Mackintosh, as an alternative to passing through the Ravine.

It may be remembered that for some days we had been vaguely uneasy about Hugh, and the uneasiness had penetrated to Mrs. Todhetley. Tod had made private mockery of it to me, thinking she must be three parts a fool to entertain any such fear. "I should like to give madam a fright," he said to me one day—meaning that he'd like to hide little Hugh for a time. But I never supposed he would really do it. And it was only to-night—hours and hours after Hugh disappeared, that Tod avowed to me the part he had taken in the loss. To make it clear to the reader, we must go back to the morning of this same day—Friday.

After breakfast I was shut up with my books, paying no attention to anything that might be going on, inside the house or out of it. Old Frost gave us a woful lot to do in the holidays. The voices of the children, playing at the swing, came wafting in through the open window; but they died away to quietness as the morning went on. About twelve o'clock Mrs. Todhetley looked in.

"Are the children here, Johnny?"

She saw they were not, and went away without waiting for an answer. Lena ran up the passage, and I heard her say papa had taken Hugh out in the pony-gig. The interruption made an excuse for putting up the books for the day, and I went out.

Of all young ragamuffins, the worst came running after me as I went through the fold-yard gate. Master Hugh! Whether he had been in the green pond again or over the house-roof, he was in a state to behold; his blue eyes not to be seen for mud, his straw hat bent, his brown holland blouse all tatters and slime, and the pretty

fair curls that Hannah was proud of and wasted her time over, a regular mass of tangle.

"Take me with you, Johnny!"

"I should think I would, like that! What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Playing with the puppy. We fell down in the mud amid the bucks. Joe says I am to stop in the barn and hide myself. I am afraid to go in-doors."

"You'll catch it, and no mistake. Come, be off back."

But he'd not go back, and kept running by my side under the high hedge. When we came to the gate at the end of the field, I stood and ordered him to go. He began to cry a little.

"Now, Hugh, you know you can not go with me in that plight. Walk yourself straight off to Hannah and get her to change the things before your mamma sees you. There; you may have the biscuit; I don't much care for it."

It was a big captain's biscuit that I had caught up in going through the dining-room. He took that readily enough, the young cormorant, but he'd not stir any the more for it; and I might have had the small object with me till now, but for the appearance of the squie's gig in the lane. The moment Hugh caught sight of his papa, he tuned tail and scampered away like a young wild animal. Remembering Mrs. Todhetley's foolish fear, I mounted the gate and watched him turn safely in at the other.

"What are you looking at, Johnny?" asked the squire, as he drove leisurely up.

"At Hugh, sir. I've sent him in-doors."

"I'm going over to Massock's, Johnny, about the bricks for that cottage. You can get up, if you like to come with me."

I got into the gig at once, and we drove to South Crabb, to Massock's place. He was not to be seen; his people thought he had gone out for the day. Upon that, the squire went on to see old Cartwright and they made us stop there and put up the pony. When we reached home it was past dinner-time. Mrs. Todhetley came running out.

"Couldn't get here before; the Cartwrights kept us," called out the squire. "We are going to catch it, Johnny," he whispered to me, with a laugh; "we've left the dinner spoil."

But it was not the dinner. "Where's Hugh?" asked Mrs. Todhetley.

"I've not seen Hugh," said the squire, flinging the reins to Luke Mackintosh, who had come up. Luke did all kinds of odd jobs about the place, and sometimes helped the groom.

"But you took Hugh out with you," she said.

"Not I," answered the squire.

Mrs. Trodhetley's face turned white. She looked from one to the other of us in a helpless kind of manner. "Lena said you did," she returned, and her voice seemed to fear its own sound. The squire, talking with Mackintosh about the pony, noticed nothing particular.

"Lena did? Oh, ay, I remember. I let Hugh get up at the door and drove him round to the fold-yard gate. I dropped him there."

He went in as he spoke: Mrs. Todhetley seemed undecided

whether to follow him. Tod had his back against the door-post, listening.

"What are you alarmed at?" he asked her, not even attempting to suppress his mocking tone.

"Oh, Johnny!" she said, "have *you* not seen him?"

"Yes; and a fine pickle he was in," I answered, telling about it. "I dare say Hannah has put him to bed for punishment."

"But Hannah has not," said Mrs. Todhetley. "She came down at four o'clock to inquire if he had come in."

However, thinking that it might possibly turn out to be so, she ran in to ascertain. Tod put his hand on my shoulder, and walked me further off.

"Johnny, did Hugh really not go with you?"

"Why of course he did not. Should I deny it if he did?"

"Where the dickens can the young idiot have got to?" mused Tod. "Jeffries vowed he saw him go off with you down the field, Johnny."

"But I sent him back. I watched him in at the fold-yard gate. You don't suppose I could take him further in that pickle!"

Tod laughed a little at the remembrance. Mrs. Todhetley returned, saying Hugh was not to be found anywhere. She looked ready to die. Tod was inwardly enjoying her fright beyond everything: it was better than a play to him. His particularly easy aspect struck her.

"Oh, Joseph!" she implored, "if you know where he is, pray tell me."

"How should I know?" returned Tod. "I protest on my honor I have not set eyes on him since before luncheon to-day."

"*Do* you know where he is, Tod?" I asked him, as she turned in-doors.

"No; but I can guess. He's not far off. And I really did think he was with you, Johnny. I suppose I must go and bring him in, now; but I'd give every individual thing my pockets contain if madam had had a few hours fright of it, instead of a few minutes."

The dinner-bell was ringing, but Tod went off in an opposite direction. And I must explain here what he knew of it, though he did not tell me then. Walking through the fold-yard that morning, he had come upon Master Hugh, just emerging from the bed of green mud, crying his eyes out, and a piteous object. Hannah had promised Hugh that the next time he got into this state of grief she would carry him to the squire. Hugh knew she'd be sure to keep her word, and that the upshot would probably be a whipping. Tod, after gratifying his eyes with the choice spectacle, and listening to the fears of the whipping, calmly assured the young gentleman that he was "in for it," at which Hugh only howled the more. All in a moment it occurred to Tod to make use of this opportunity to frighten Mrs. Todhetley. He took Hugh off to the barn, and told him that if he'd hide himself there until the evening, he'd not only get him off his whipping, but give him all sorts of good things besides. Hugh was willing to promise, but said he wanted his dinner, upon which Tod went and brought him a heap of bread and butter, telling Molly, who cut it, that it was for himself. Tod left him devouring it in the dark corner behind the wagon, particularly im-

pressing upon him the fact that he was to keep close and make no sign if his mamma or Hannah, or anybody else, came to look for him. One of the men, Jeffries, was at work in the barn, and Tod, so to say, took him into confidence, ordering him to know nothing if Master Hugh were inquired for. As Hannah and Jeffries were at daggers drawn, and the man supposed this hiding was to spite her, he entered into it with interest.

There were two barns at Crabb Cot. One some way down the road; in front of the house was the store barn, and you've heard of it before in connection with something seen by Maria Lease. It was called the yellow barn from the color of its outer walls. The other of red brick, was right at the back of the fold-yard, and it was in this last that Tod left Hugh, all safe and secure, as he thought, until told he might come out again.

But now, when Tod went into the dining-room to luncheon at half-past twelve—we country people breakfast early—at which meal he expected the hue and cry after Hugh to set in, for it was the children's dinner, he found there was a hitch in the programme. Mrs. Todhetley appeared perfectly easy on the score of Hugh's absence, and presently casually mentioned that he had gone out with his papa in the pony-gig. Tod's lips parted to say that Hugh was not in the pony-gig, but in a state of pickle instead. Prudence caused him to close them again. Hannah, standing behind Lena's chair, openly gave thanks that the child was got rid of for a bit, and said he was "getting almost beyond her." Tod bit his lips with vexation: the gilt was taken off the gingerbread. He went to the barn again presently, and then found that Hugh had left it. Jeffries said he saw him going toward the lane with Master Ludlow, and supposed that the little lad had taken the opportunity to slip out of the barn when he (Jeffries) went to dinner, at twelve o'clock. And thus the whole afternoon had gone peaceably and unsuspiciously on; Mrs. Todhetley and Hannah supposing Hugh was with the squire, Tod supposing he must be somewhere with me.

And when we both appeared at home without him, Tod took it for granted that Hugh had gone back to his hiding-place in the barn, and a qualm of conscience shot through him for leaving the lad there so many hours unlooked after. He rushed off to it at once, while the dinner-bell was ringing. But when he got there, Jeffries declared Hugh had not been back to it at all. Tod, in his hot way, retorted on Jeffries for saying so; but the man persisted that he could not be mistaken, as he had never been away from the barn since coming back from dinner.

And then arose the commotion. Tod came back with a stern face, almost as anxious as Mrs. Todhetley's. Hugh had not been seen, so far as could be ascertained, since I watched him in at the fold-yard gate soon after twelve. That was nearly seven hours ago. Tod felt himself responsible for the loss, and sent the men to look about. But the worst he thought then was, that the boy, whose fears of showing himself in his state of dilapidation Tod himself had mischievously augmented, had laid down somewhere or other and dropped asleep.

It had gone on, and on, and on, until late at night, and then had occurred that explanation between Tod and his step-mother told of

in the other paper. Tod was all impulse, and pride, and heat, and passion; but his heart was made of sterling gold, just like the squire's. Holding himself aloof from her in haughty condemnation, in the matter of the mysterious stranger, to find now that the stranger was a man called Alfred Arne, *his* relative, and that Mrs. Todhetley had been generously taking the trouble upon herself for the sake of sparing him and his father pain, completely turned Tod and his pride over.

He had grown desperately frightened as the hours went on. The moonlit night had become dark, as I've already said, and the men could not pursue their search to much effect. Tod did not cease his. He got a lantern, and went rushing about as if he were crazy. You saw him come up with it from the Ravine, and now he had gone back on a wild-goose chase after the ghost's light. Where was Hugh? Where could he be? It was not likely Alfred Arne had taken him, because he had that afternoon got from Mrs. Todhetley the fifty pounds he worried for, and she thought he had gone finally off with it. It stood to reason that the child would be an incumbrance to him. On the other hand, Tod's theory, that Hugh had dropped asleep somewhere, seemed, as the hours crept on, less and less likely to hold water, for he'd have wakened up and come home long ago. As to the Ravine, in spite of Tod's suspicions that he might be there, I was sure the little fellow would not have ventured into it.

I stood on, in the dark night, waiting for Tod to come back again. It felt awfully desolate now Luke Mackintosh had gone. The ghost's light did not show again. I rather wished it would, for company. He came at last—Tod, not the ghost. I had heard him shouting, and nothing answered but the echoes. A piece of his coat was torn, and some brambles were sticking to him, and the lantern was broken; what dangerous places he had pushed himself into could never be told.

"I wonder you've come out with whole limbs, Tod."

"Hold your peace, Johnny," was all the retort I got; and his voice rose nearly to a shout in its desperate sorrow.

Morning came, but no news with it, no Hugh. Tod had been about all night. With daylight, the fields, and all other seemingly possible places, were searched. Tom Coney went knocking at every house in North and South Crabb, and burst into cottages, and turned over, so to say, all the dwellings in that savory locality, Crabb Lane, but with no result. The squire was getting anxious; but none of us had ventured to tell him of our especial cause for anxiety, or to speak of Alfred Arne.

It appeared nearly certain now, to us, that he had gone with Alfred Arne, and, after a private consultation with Mrs. Todhetley, Tod and I set out in search of the man. She still wished to spare the knowledge of his visit to the squire, if possible.

We had not far to go. Mrs. Todhetley's fears went ranging abroad to London, or Liverpool, or the Coral Islands beyond the sea, of which Arne had talked to Hugh: but Arne was found at Timberdale. In an obscure lodging in the further outskirts of the place, the landlord of which, a man named Cookum, was a bad

character, and very shy of the police, Arne was found. We might have searched for him to the month's end, but for Luke Mackintosh. When Luke arrived at Timberdale in the middle of the night, ordered thither by Tod to make inquiries at the police-station, he saw a tipsy man slink into Cookum's house, and recognized him for the one who had recently been exciting speculation at home. Luke happened to mention this to Tod, not connecting Hugh with it at all, simply as a bit of gossip: of course it was not known who Arne was, or his name, or what he had been waiting for.

We had a fight to get in. Cookum came leaping down the crazy stairs, and put himself in our way in the passage, swearing we should not go on. Tod lifted his strong hand.

"I mean to go on, Cookum," he said, in a slow, quiet voice that had determination in every tone of it. "I have come to see a man named Arne. I don't want to do him any ill, or you either; but, see him, I will. If you do not move out of my way I'll knock you down."

Cookum stood his ground. He was short, slight, and sickly, with a puffy face and red hair; a very reed beside Tod.

"There ain't no man here of that name. There ain't no man here at all."

"Very well. Then you can't object to letting me see that there is not."

"I swear that you sha'n't see, master. There!"

Tod flung him aside. Cookum, something like an eel, slipped under Tod's arm, and was in front again.

"I don't care to damage you, Cookum, as you must see I could do, and force my way in over your disabled body; you look too weak for it. But I'll either go in *so*, or the police shall clear an entrance for me."

The mention of the police scared the man; I saw it in his face. Tod kept pushing on and the man backing, just a little.

"I won't have no police here. What is it you want?"

"I have told you once. A man named Arne."

"I swear then that I never knowed a man o' that name; let alone having him in my place."

And he spoke with such passionate fervor that it struck me Arne did not go by his own name: which was more than probable. They were past the stairs now, and Cookum did not seem to care to guard them. The nasty passage, long and narrow, its wet walls nearly touching one's arms on either side, had a door at the end. Tod thought that must be the fortress.

"You are a great fool, Cookum. I've told you that I mean no harm to you or to anybody in the place; so to make this fuss is needless. You may have a band of felons concealed here, or a cartload of stolen goods; they are all safe for me. But if you force me to bring in the police it might be a different matter."

Perhaps the argument told on the man; perhaps the tone of reason it was spoken in; but he certainly seemed to hesitate.

"You can't prove that to me, master! not that there's any felons or things in here. Show me that you don't mean harm, and you shall go on."

"Have you got a stolen child here?"

Cookum's mouth opened with genuine surprise. "A stolen child!"

"We have lost a little boy. I have reason to think that a man who was seen to enter this passage in the middle of the night knows something of him, and I have come to ask and see. Now you know all. Let me go on."

The relief on the man's face was great. "Honor bright, master?"

"Don't stand quibbling, man," roared Tod, passionately. "YES!"

"I've got but one man in all the place. He have got no boy with him, he haven't."

"But he may know something of one. What's his name?"

"All the name he've give to me is Jack."

"I dare say it's the same. Come! you are wasting time."

But Cookum, doubtful still, never moved. They were close to the door now, and he had his back against it. Tod turned his head.

"Go for the two policemen, Johnny. They are both in readiness, Cookum. I looked in at the station as I came by, to say I might want them."

Before I could get out, Cookum howled out to me *not* to go, as one in mortal fear. He took a latch-key from his pocket, and put it into the latch of the door, which had no other fastening outside, not even a handle. "You can open it yourself," said he to Tod, and slipped away.

It might have been a sort of kitchen but that it looked so like a den, with nothing to light it but a dirty sky-light above. The floor was of red brick: a tea-kettle boiled on the fire; there was a smell of coffee. Alfred Arne stood on the defensive against the opposite wall, a life-preserver in his hand, and his thin hair on end with fright.

"I am here on a peaceable errand, if you will allow it to be so," said Tod, shutting us in. "Is your name Arne?"

Arne dropped the life-preserver into the breast-pocket of his coat, and came forward with something of a gentleman's courtesy.

"Yes, my name is Arne, Joseph Todhetley. And your mother —as I make no doubt you know—was a very near relative of mine. If you damage me, you will bring her name unpleasantly before the public, as well as your own and your father's."

That he thought our errand was to demand back the fifty pounds, there could be no doubt: perhaps to hand him into custody if he refused to give it up.

"I have not come to damage you in any way," said Tod in answer. "Where's Hugh?"

Arne looked as surprised as the other man had. "Hugh!"

"Yes, Hugh: my little brother. Where is he?"

"How can I tell?"

Tod glanced round the place; there was not any nook or corner capable of affording concealment. Arne gazed at him. He stood on that side the dirty deal table, we on this.

"We have lost Hugh since midday yesterday. Do you know anything of him?"

"Certainly *not*," was the emphatic answer, and I at least saw

that it was a true one. "Is it to ask that, that you have come here?"

"For that, and nothing else. We have been up all night searching for him."

"But why do you come after him here? I am not likely to know where he is."

"I think you are likely."

"Why?"

"You have been talking to the boy about carrying him off with you to see coral islands. You hinted, I believe, to Mrs. Todhetley that you might really take him, if your demands were not complied with."

Arne slightly laughed. "I talked to the boy about the Coral Islands because it pleased him. As to Mrs. Todhetley, if she has the sense of a goose, she must have known I meant nothing. Take off a child with me! Why, if he were made a present to me, I should only drop him at his own door at Crabb Cot, as they drop the foundlings at the gate of the Maison Dieu in Paris. Joseph Todhetley, I *could not* be encumbered with a child: the life of shifts and concealment I have to lead would debar it."

I think Tod saw he was in earnest. But he stood in indecision; this dashed out his great hope.

"I should have been away from here last night, but that I got a drop too much and must wait till dark again," resumed Arne. "The last time I saw Hugh was on Thursday afternoon. He was in the meadow with *you*."

"I did not see you," remarked Tod.

"I saw you, though. And that is the last time I saw him. Don't you believe me? You may. I like the little lad, and would find him for you if I could, rather than help to lose him. I'd say take my honor upon this, Joseph Todhetley, only you might retort that it has not been worth anything this many a year."

"And with justice," said Tod, boldly.

"True. The world has been against me and I against the world. But it has not come yet with me to steal children. With the loan of the money now safe in my pocket, I shall make a fresh start in life. A precious long time your step-mother kept me waiting for it."

"She did her best. You ought not to have applied to her at all."

"I know that: it should have been to the other side of the house. She prevented me: wanting, she said, to spare you and your father."

"The knowledge of the disgrace. Yes."

"There's no need to have recourse to hard names, Joseph Todhetley. What I am, I am: but you have not much cause to grumble, for I don't trouble you often. As many thousand miles away as the seas can put between me and England I'm going now: and it's nearly as many chances to one against your ever seeing me again."

Tod turned to depart: the intensely haughty look his face wore at odd moments had been upon it throughout the interview. Had he been a woman he might have stood with his skirts picked up, as

if to save them contamination from some kind of reptile. He stayed for a final word.

"Then I may take your answer in good faith—that you know nothing of Hugh?"

"Take it, or not, as you please. If I knew that I was going to stand next minute in the presence of Heaven, I could not give it more truthfully. For the child's own sake, I hope he will be found. Why don't you ask the man who owns the rooms?—he can tell you I have had no boy here. If you choose to watch me away to-night, do so; you'll see I go alone. A child with me! I might about as well give myself up to the law at once, for I shouldn't long remain out of its clutches, Joseph Todhetley."

"Good-morning," said Tod shortly. I echoed the words, and we were civilly answered. As we went out, Arne shut the door behind us. In the middle of the passage stood Cookum.

"Have you found he was who you wanted, sir?"

"Yes," answered Tod, not vouchsafing to explain. "Another time when I say I do not wish to harm you, perhaps you'll take my word."

Mrs. Todhetley, pale and anxious, was standing under the mulberry-tree when we got back. She came across the grass.

"Any news?" cried Tod. As if the sight of her was not enough, that he need have asked!

"No, no, Joseph. Did you see him?"

"Yes, he had not left. He knows nothing of Hugh."

"I had no hope that he did," moaned poor Mrs. Todhetley. "All he wanted was the money."

We turned into the dining-room by the glass doors, and it seemed to strike out a gloomy chill. On the wall near the window, there was a chalk drawing of Hugh in colors, hung up by a bit of common string. It was only a rough sketch that Jane Coney had done half in sport; but it was like him, especially in the blue eyes and the pretty light hair.

"Where's my father?" asked Tod.

"Gone riding over to the brick-fields again," she answered: "he can not get it out of his mind that Hugh must be there. Joseph, as Mr. Arne has nothing to do with the loss, we can still spare your father the knowledge that he has been here. Spare it, I mean, for good."

"Yes. Thank you."

Hugh was uncommonly fond of old Massock's brick-fields; he would go there on any occasion that offered, had once or twice strayed there a truant; sending Hannah, for the time being, into a state of mortal fright. The squire's opinion was that Hugh must have decamped there sometime in the course of the Friday afternoon, perhaps followed the gig; and was staying there, afraid to come home.

"He might have hung on to the tail of the gig itself, and I and Johnny never have seen him, the 'cute Turk," argued the squire.

Which I knew was just as likely as that he had, unseen, hung on to the moon. In the state he had brought his clothes to, he'd not have gone to the brick-fields at all. The squire did not seem so uneasy as he might have been. Hugh would be sure to turn up,

he said, and should get the soundest whipping any young rascal ever had.

But he came riding back from the brick-fields as before—without him. Tod, awfully impatient, met him in the road by the yellow barn. The squire got off his horse there, for Luke Mackintosh was at hand to take it.

"Father, I can not think of any other place he can have got to: we have searched everywhere. Can you?"

"Not I, Joe. Don't be down-hearted. He'll turn up; he'll turn up. Halloa!" broke off the squire as an idea struck him, "has this barn been searched?"

"He can't be in there, sir; it's just a moral impossibility that he could be," spoke up Mackintosh. "The place was empty, which I can be upon my oath, when I locked it up yesterday afternoon, after getting some corn out; and the key have never been out o' my trousers' pocket since. Mr. Joseph, he was inside with me at the time, and he knows it."

Tod nodded assent, and the squire walked away. As there was no other accessible entrance to the front barn, and the windows were ever so many yards from the ground, they felt it must be, as the man said, a "moral impossibility."

The day went on—it was Saturday, remember—and the miserable hours went on, and there came no trace of the child. The Ravine was again searched thoroughly, that is, as thoroughly as its overgrown state permitted. It was like waste of time; for Hugh would not have hidden himself in it; and if he had fallen over the fence he'd have been found before from the traces that must have been left in the bushes. The searchers would come in, one after another, now a farm-servant, now one of the police, bringing no news, except of defeat, but hoping somebody else had brought it. Every time that Tod looked at the poor mild face of Mrs. Todhetley, always meek and patient, striving ever to hide the anguish that each fresh disappointment brought, I know he felt ready to hang himself. It was getting dusk when Maria Lease came up with a piece of straw hat that she had found in the withy walk. But both Mrs. Todhetley and Hannah, upon looking at it, decided that the straw was of finer grain than Hugh's.

That afternoon they dragged the pond, but there was nothing found in it. We could get no traces anywhere. Nobody had seen him, nobody heard of him. From the moment when I had watched him into the fold-yard gate it seemed that he had altogether vanished from above ground. Since then all scent of him was missing. It was very strange: just as though the boy had been spirited away.

Sunday morning rose. As lovely a Sunday as ever this world saw, but all sad for us. Tod had flung himself back in the Pater's easy-chair, pretty nigh done over. Two nights, and he had not been to bed. In spite of his faith in Alfred Arne's denial, he had chosen to watch him away in the night from Timberdale; and he saw the man steal off in the darkness on foot and alone. The incessant hunting about was bringing its reaction on Tod, and the fatigue of body and mind began to show itself. But as to giving in, he'd

never do that, and would be as likely as not to walk and worry himself into a fever.

The day was warm and beautiful; the glass doors of the room stood open to the sweet summer air. Light fleecy clouds floated over the blue sky, the sun shone on the green grass of the lawn and sparkled amid the leaves of the great mulberry-tree. Butterflies flitted past in pairs, chasing each other; bees sent forth their hum as they sipped the honey-dew from the flowers; the birds sung their love-songs on the boughs: all seemed happiness outside, as if to mock our care within.

Tod lay back with his eyes closed: I sat on the arm of the old red sofa. The bells of North Crabb church rang out for morning service. It was a rather cracked old peal, but on great occasions the ringers assembled and did their best. The Bishop of Worcester was coming over to-day to preach a charity sermon: and North Crabb never had anything greater than that. Tod opened his eyes and listened in silence.

"Tod, do you know what it puts me in mind of?"

"Don't bother. It's because of the bishop, I suppose."

"I don't mean the bells. It's like the old fable, told of in 'The Mistletoe Bough,' enacted in real life. If there were any deep chest about the premises—"

"Hold your peace, Johnny!—unless you want to drive me mad. If we come upon the child like *that*, I'll—I'll —"

I think he was going to say shoot himself, or something of that sort, for he was given to random speech when put to it. But at that moment Lena ran in dressed for church, in her white frock and straw hat with blue ribbons. She threw her hands on Tod's knee and burst out crying.

"Joe, I don't want to go to church; I want Hugh."

Quite a spasm of pain shot across his face, but he was very tender with her. In all my life I had never seen Tod so gentle as he had been at moments during the last two days.

"Don't cry, pretty one," he said, pushing the fair curls from her face. "Go to church like a good little girl; perhaps we shall have found him by the time you come home."

"Hannah says he's lying dead somewhere."

"Hannah's nothing but a wicked woman," savagely answered Tod. "Don't you mind her."

But Lena would not be pacified, and kept on sobbing and crying, "I want Hugh; I want Hugh."

Mrs. Todhetley, who had come in then, drew her away and sat down with the child on her knee, talking to her in a low, soothing tone.

"Lena, dear, you know I wish you to go with Hannah to church this morning. And you will put papa's money into the plate. See: it is a golden sovereign. Hannah must carry it, and you shall put it in."

"Oh, mamma! will Hugh never come home again? Will he die?"

"Hush, Lena," she said, as Tod bit his lip and gave his hair a dash backward. "Shall I tell you something that sounds like a pretty story?"

Lena was always ready for a story, pretty or ugly, and her blue eyes were lifted to her mother's brightly through the tears. At that moment she looked wonderfully like the portrait on the wall.

"Just now, dear, I was in my room upstairs, feeling very, very unhappy; I'm not sure but I was sobbing nearly as much as you were just now. 'He will never come back,' I said to myself; 'he is lost to us forever.' At that moment those sweet bells broke out, calling people to Heaven's service, and I don't know why, Lena, but they seemed to whisper a great comfort to me. They seemed to say that God was over us all, and saw our trouble, and would heal it in His good time."

Lena stared a little, digesting what she could of the words. The tears were nowhere.

"Will He send Hugh back?"

"I can't tell, darling. He can take care of Hugh, and bless him, and keep him, wherever he may be, and I know He *will*. If He should have taken him to Heaven above the blue sky—oh then, Hugh must be very happy. He will be with the angels. He will see Jesus face to face; and you know how *He* loved little children. The bells seemed to say all this to me as I listened to them, Lena."

Lena went off contented: we saw her skipping along by Hannah's side, who had on a new purple gown and staring red and green trimmings to her bonnet. Children are as changeable as a chameleon, sobbing one minute, laughing the next. Tod was standing now with his back to the window, and Mrs. Todhetley sat by the table, her long thin fingers supporting her cheek; very meek, very, very patient. Tod was thinking so as he glanced at her.

"How you must hate me for this!" he said.

"Oh, Joseph! Hate you?"

"The thing is all my fault. A great deal has been my fault for a long while; all the unpleasantness and the misunderstanding."

She got up and took his hand timidly, as if she feared he might think it too great a liberty. "If you can only understand me for the future, Joseph; understand how I wish and try to make things pleasant to you, I shall be fully repaid: to you most especially in all the house, after your father. I have ever striven and prayed for it."

He answered nothing for the moment; his face was working a little, and he gave her fingers a grip that must have caused pain.

"If the worst comes of this, and Hugh never is amidst us again, I will go over the seas in the wake of the villain Arne," he said in a low, firm tone, "and spare you the sight of me."

Tears began to trickle down her face. "Joseph, my dear—if you will let me call you so—this shall draw us near to each other, as we never might have been drawn without it. You shall not hear a word of reproach from me, or any word but love; there shall never be a thought of reproach in my heart. I have had a great deal of sorrow in my life, Joseph, and have learned patiently to bear, leaving all things to Heaven."

"And if Hugh is dead?"

"What I said to Lena, I meant," she softly whispered. "If God has taken him he is with the angels, far happier than he could be in this world of care, though his lot were of the brightest."

The tears were running down her cheeks as she went out of the room. Tod stood still as a stone.

"She is made of gold," I whispered.

"No, Johnny. Of something better."

The sound of the bells died away. None of us went to church; in the present excitement it would have been a farce. The squire had gone riding about the roads, sending his groom the opposite way. He telegraphed to the police at Worcester; saying, in the message, that these country officers were no better than dummies; and openly lamented at home that it had not happened at Dyke Manor, within the range of old Jones the constable.

Tod disappeared with the last sound of the bells. Just as the Pater's head was full of the brick-fields, his was of the Ravine; that he had gone off to beat it again I was sure. In a trouble such as this you want incessantly to be up and doing. Lena and Hannah came back from church, the child calling out for Hugh: she wanted to tell him about the gentleman who had preached in big white sleeves and pretty frills on his wrists.

Two o'clock was the Sunday dinner-hour. Tod came in when it was striking. He looked dead-beat as he sat down to carve in his father's place. The sirloin of beef was as good as usual, but only Lena seemed to think so. The little gobbler ate two servings, and a heap of raspberry pie and cream.

How it happened, I don't know. I was just as anxious as any of them, and yet, in sitting under the mulberry-tree, I fell fast asleep, never waking till five. Mrs. Todhetley, always finding excuses for us, said it was worry and want of proper rest. She was sitting close to the window, her head leaning against it. The squire had not come home. Tod was somewhere about, she did not know where.

I found him in the yard. Luke Mackintosh was harnessing the pony to the gig, Tod helping him in a state of excitement. Some man had come in with a tale that a tribe of gypsies was discovered, encamped beyond the brick-fields, who seemed to have been there for a week past. Tod jumped to the conclusion that Hugh was concealed with them, and was about to go off in search.

"Will you come with me, Johnny? Luke must remain in case the squire rides in."

"Of course I will. I'll run and tell Mrs. Todhetley."

"Stay where you are, you stupid muff. To excite her hopes, in the uncertainty, would be cruel. Get up."

Tod need not have talked about excited hopes. He was just three parts mad. Fancy his great strong hands shaking as he took the reins! The pony dashed off in a fright with the cut he gave it, and brought us cleverly against the post of the gate, breaking the near shaft. Over *that*, but for the delay, Tod would have been cool as an orange.

"The phaeton now, single horse," he called out to Mackintosh.

"Yes, sir. Bob, or Blister?"

Tod stamped his foot in a passion. "As if it mattered! Blister; he is the more fiery of the two."

"I must get the harness," said Mackintosh. "It is in the yellow barn."

Mackintosh went round on the run to gain the front barn; the harness, least used, was kept there, hung on the walls. Tod unharnessed the pony, left me to lead him to the stable, and went after the man. In his state of impatience and his strength, he could have done the work of ten men. He met Mackintosh coming out of the barn, without the harness, but with a white face. Since he saw the ghost's light on Friday night the man had been scared at shadows.

"There's sum'at in there, master," said he, his teeth chattering.

"What?" roared Tod, in desperate anger.

"There *is*, master. It's like a faint tapping."

Tod dashed in, controlling his hands, lest they might take French leave and strike Luke for a coward. He was seeking the proper set of harness, when a knocking, faint and irregular, smote his ear. Tod turned to look, and thought it came from the staircase door. He went forward and opened it.

Lying at the foot of the stairs was Hugh. Hugh! Low, and weak, and faint, there he lay, his blue eyes only half opened, and his pretty curls mingling with the dust.

"Hugh! is it you, my darling?"

Tod's gasp was like a great cry. Hugh put up his little feeble hand, and a smile parted his lips.

"Yes, it's me, Joe."

The riddle is easily solved. When sent back by me, Hugh saw Hannah in the fold-yard; she was, in point of fact, looking after him. In his fear, he stole round to hide in the shrubbery, and thence got to the front of the house, and ran away down the road. Seeing the front barn-door open, for it was when Luke Mackintosh was getting the corn, Hugh slipped in and hid behind the door. Luke went out with the first lot of corn, and the senseless child, hearing Tod's voice outside, got into the place leading to the stairs, and shut the door. Luke, talking to Tod, who had stepped inside the barn, saw the door was shut and slipped the big outside bolt, *never remembering that it was not he who had shut it.* Poor little Hugh, when their voices had died away, ran upstairs to get to the upper garnary, and found its door fastened. And there the child was shut up beyond reach of call and hearing. The skylight in the roof, miles, as it seemed, above him, had its ventilator open. He had called and called; but his voice must have been lost amidst the space of the barn. It was too weak to disturb a rat now.

Tod took him up in his arms, tenderly as if he had been a newborn baby that he was hushing to the rest of death.

"Were you frightened, child?"

"I was till I heard the church-bells," whispered Hugh. "I don't know how long it was—oh, a great while—and I had eat the biscuit Johnny gave me and been asleep. I was not frightened then, Joe; I thought they'd come to me when church was over."

I met the procession. What the dirty object might be in Tod's arms was quite a mystery at first. Tod's eyes were dropping tears upon it, and his breath was coming in great sobs. Luke brought up the rear a few yards behind, looking as if he'd never find his senses again.

"Oh, Tod! will he get over it?"

"Yes. Please God."

"Is he injured?"

"No, no. Get out of my way, Johnny. Go to the mother now, if you like. Tell her he has only been shut up in the barn and I'm coming in with him. The dirt's nothing; it was on him before."

Just as meek and gentle she stood as ever, the tears rolling down her face, and a quiet joy in it. Tod brought him in, laying him across her knee as she sat on the sofa.

"There," he said. "He'll be all right when he has been washed and had something to eat."

"God bless you, Joseph!" she whispered.

Tod could say no more. He bent to kiss Hugh; lifted his face, and kissed the mother. And then he went rushing out with a great burst of emotion.

OUR VISIT.

A GREAT PUZZLE.

I.

WE went down from Oxford together, I and Tod and William Whitney, accompanying Miss Deveen and Helen and Anna Whitney, who had been there for a few days. Miss Deveen's carriage was waiting at the Paddington station; she got into it with Tod, and William and I followed in a cab with the luggage. Miss Deveen had invited us all to stay with her.

Miss Cattledon, the companion, with her tall, thin figure, her pinched-in waist and her creaking stays, stood ready to receive us when we reached the house. Miss Deveen held out her hand.

"How have you been, Jemima? Taking care of yourself, I hope!"

"Quite well, thank you, Miss Deveen; and very glad to see you at home again," returned Cattledon. "This is my niece, Janet Carey."

A slight, small girl, with smooth brown hair and a quiet face that looked as if it had just come out of some wasting illness, was hiding herself behind Cattledon. Miss Deveen said a few pleasant words of welcome, and took her hand. The girl looked as shy and frightened as though we had all been a pack of gorillas.

"Thank you, ma'am; you are very kind," she said, in a tremble; and her voice, I noticed, was low and pleasant. I like nice voices, whether in man or woman.

"It wants but half an hour to dinner-time," said Miss Deveen, untying the strings of her bonnet. "Miss Cattledon, will you show these young friends of ours the rooms you have appropriated to them."

My room and Tod's—two beds in it—was on the second floor; Helen and Anna had the best company room below, near Miss Deveen's; Bill had a little one lower still, half-way up the first flight of stairs. Miss Cattledon's room, we found out, was next to ours, and her niece slept with her.

Tod threw himself full length on his counterpane—tired out, he said. Certain matters had not gone very smoothly for him at Oxford, and the smart remained.

"You'll be late, Tod," I said, when I was ready.

"Plenty of time, Johnny. I don't suppose I shall keep dinner waiting."

Miss Deveen stood at the door of the blue room when I went

down: that pretty sitting-room, exclusively hers, that I remembered so well. She had on a purple silk gown, with studs of pale yellow topaz in its white lace front, studs every whit as beautiful as the emeralds made free with by Sophie Chalk.

"Come in here, Johnny."

She was beginning to talk to me as we stood by the fire, when some one was heard to enter the inner room; Miss Deveen's bedchamber, which opened from this room as well as from the landing. She crossed over into it, and I heard Cattledon's voice.

"It is so very kind of you, Miss Deveen, to have allowed me to bring my niece here! Under the circumstances—with such a cloud upon her—"

"She is quite welcome," interrupted Miss Deveen's voice.

"Yes, I know that, I know it: and I could not go down without thanking you. I have told Lettice to take some tea up to her while we dine. She can come to the drawing-room afterward if you have no objection."

"Why can't she dine with us?" asked Miss Deveen.

"Better not," said Cattledon. "She does not expect it; and with so many at table—"

"Nonsense!" came Miss Deveen's quick, decisive interruption. "Many at table! There are enough servants to wait on us, and I suppose you have enough dinner. Go and bring her down."

Miss Deveen came back, holding out her hand to me as she crossed the room. The gong sounded as we went down to the drawing-room. They all came crowding in, Tod last; and we went in to dinner.

Miss Deveen, with her fresh and handsome face and her snow-white hair, took the head of the table. Cattledon, at the foot, a green velvet ribbon round her genteel throat, helped the soup. William Whitney sat on Miss Deveen's right, I on her left. Janet Carey sat next to him—and this brought her nearly opposite me.

She had an old black silk on, with a white frill at the throat—very poor and plain as contrasted with the light gleaming silks of Helen and Anna. But she had nice eyes; their color a light hazel, their expression honest and sweet. It was a pity she could not get some color into her wan face, and a little courage into her manner.

After coffee we sat down in the drawing-room to a round game at cards, and then had some music; Helen playing first. Janet Carey was at the table, looking at a view in an album. I went up to her.

Had I caught her staring at some native Indians tarred and feathered, she could not have given a worse jump. It might have been fancy, but I thought her face turned white.

"Did I startle you, Miss Carey? I am very sorry."

"Oh, thank you—no. Every one is very kind. The truth is"—pausing a moment and looking at the view—"I knew the place in early life, and was lost in old memories. Past times and events connected with it came back to me. I recognized the place at once, though I was only ten years old when I left it."

"Places do linger in the memory in a singularly vivid manner sometimes. Especially those we have known when young."

"I can recognize every spot in this," she said, gazing still at the album. "And I have not seen it for fifteen years."

"Fifteen. I—I understood you to say you were ten years old when you left it."

"So I was. I am twenty-five now."

So much as that! So much older than any of us! I could hardly believe it.

"I should not have taken you for more than seventeen, Miss Carey."

"At seventeen I went out to get my own living," she said, in a sad tone, but with a candor that I liked. "That is eight years ago."

Helen's music ceased with a crash. Miss Deveen came up to Janet Carey.

"My dear, I hear you can sing: your aunt tells me so. Will you sing a song to please me?"

She was like a startled fawn: looking here, looking there, and turning white and red. But she rose at once.

"I will sing if you wish it, madam. But my singing is only plain singing: just a few old songs. I have never learned to sing."

"The old songs are the best," said Miss Deveen. "Can you sing that sweet song of all songs—'Blow, blow, thou wintery wind'?"

She went to the piano, struck the chords quietly, without any flourish or prelude, and began the first note.

Oh, the soft, sweet, musical voice that broke upon us! Not a powerful voice, that astounds the nerves like an electric machine; but one of that intense, thrilling, plaintive harmony which brings a mist to the eye and a throb to the heart. Tod backed against the wall to look at her: Bill, who had taken up the cat, let it drop through his knees.

You might have heard a pin drop when the last words died away: "As friends remembering not." Miss Deveen broke the silence: praising her and telling her to go on again. The girl did not seem to have the least notion of refusing: she appeared to have lived under submission. I think Miss Deveen would have liked her to go on forever.

"The wonder to me is that you can remember the accompaniment to so many songs without your notes," cried Helen Whitney.

"I do not know my notes. I can not play."

"Not know your notes!"

"I never learned them. I never learned music. I just play some few chords by ear that will harmonize with the songs. That is why my singing is so poor, so different from other people's. Where I have been living they say it is not worth listening to."

She spoke in a meek, deprecating manner. I had heard of self-depreciation; this was an instance of it. Janet Carey was one of the humble ones.

The next day was Good Friday. We went to church under lowering clouds, and came home again to luncheon. Cattledon's face was all vinegar when we sat down to it.

"There's that woman down-stairs again!—that Ness!" she exclaimed with acrimony. "Making herself at home with the servants!"

"I'm glad to hear it," smiled Miss Deveen. "She'll get some dinner, poor thing."

Cattledon sniffed. "It's not a month since she was here before."

"And I'm sure if she came every week she'd be welcome to a meal," spoke Miss Deveen. "Ah, now, young ladies," she went on in a joking tone, "if you wanted your fortunes told, Mrs. Ness is the one to do it."

"Does she tell the truth?" asked Helen, eagerly.

"Oh, very true, of course," laughed Miss Deveen. "She'll promise you a rich husband apiece. Dame Ness is a good woman, and has had many misfortunes. I have known her through all of them."

"And helped her too," resentfully put in Cattledon.

"But does she *really* tell fortunes?" pursued Helen.

"She thinks she does," laughed Miss Deveen. "She told mine once—many a year ago."

"And did it come true?"

"Well, as far as I remember, she candidly confessed that there was not much to tell—that my life would be prosperous but uneventful."

"I *don't* think, begging your pardon, Miss Deveen, that it is quite a proper subject for young people," struck in Cattledon, drawing up her thin red neck.

"Dear me, no," replied Miss Deveen, still laughing a little. And the subject dropped, and we finished luncheon.

The rain had come on, a regular downpour. We went into the breakfast-room; though why it was called that I don't know, since breakfast was never taken there. It was a fair sized, square room, built out at the back, and gained by a few stairs down from the hall and a passage. Somehow people prefer plain rooms to grand ones for every-day use; perhaps that was why we all took a liking to this room, for it was plain enough. An old carpet on the floor, chairs covered with tumbled chintz, and always a good blazing fire in the grate. Miss Deveen would go in there to write her business letters—when she had any to write; or to cut out sewing with Cattledon for the house-maids. An old-fashioned secretary stood against the wall, in which receipts and other papers were kept. The French window opened to the garden.

"Pour, pour, pour! It's going to be wet for the rest of the day," said Tod, gloomily.

Cattledon came in, equipped for church in a long brown cloak, a pair of clogs in her hand. Did none of us intend to go, she asked. Nobody answered. The weather outside was not tempting.

"You must come, Janet Carey," she said very tartly, angry with us all, I expect. "Go and put on your things."

"No," interposed Miss Deveen. "It would not be prudent for your niece to venture out in this rain, Jemima."

"The church is only over the way."

"But consider the illness she has but just recovered from. Let her stay in-doors."

Cattledon went off without further opposition, Janet kneeling down unasked to put on her clogs, and then opening her umbrella

for her in the hall. Janet did not come in again. Miss Deveen went out to sit with a sick neighbor; so we were alone.

"What a cranky old thing that Cattledon is!" cried Bill, throwing down his newspaper. She'd have walked that sick girl off in the wet, you see."

"How old is Cattledon?" asked Tod. "Sixty?"

"Oh, you stupid fellow!" exclaimed Helen, looking up from the stool on the hearth-rug, where she was sitting, nursing her knees. "Cattledon sixty! Why, she can't be above forty-five."

It was disrespectful, no doubt, but we all called her plain "Cattledon" behind her back, putting no handle to her name

"That's rather a queer girl, that niece," said Tod. "She won't speak to one; she's like a frightened hare."

"I like her," said Anna. "I feel very sorry for her. She gives one the idea of having been always put upon; and she looks dreadfully ill."

"I should say she has been kept in some Blue Beard's cupboard, among a lot of hanging wives that have permanently scared her," remarked Bill.

"It's Cattledon," said Tod; "it's not the wives. She puts upon the girl and frightens her senses out of her. Cattledon's a cross-grained, two-edged—"

He had to shut up; Janet Carey was coming in again. For about five minutes nobody spoke. There seemed to be nothing to say. Bill played at ball with Miss Deveen's red pen-wiper; Anna began turning over the periodicals; Helen gave the cat a box when it would have jumped on her knee.

"Well, this is lively!" cried Tod. "Nothing on earth to do; I wonder why the rain couldn't have kept off till to-morrow?"

"I say," whispered Helen, treason sparkling from her bright eyes, "let us have up that old fortune-teller! I'll go and ask Lettice."

She whisked out of the room, shutting the tail of her black silk dress in the door, and called Lettice. A few minutes, and Mrs. Ness came in, courtesying. A stout old lady in a cotton shawl and broad-bordered cap with a big red bow tied in front.

"I say, Mrs. Ness, can you tell our fortunes?" cried Bill.

"Bless you, young gentlefolks, I've told a many in my time. I'll tell yours, if you like to bid me, sir."

"Do the cards tell true?"

"I believe they does, sir. I've knowed 'em to tell over true now and again—more's the pity!'

"Why do you say more's the pity?" asked Anna.

"When they've foretelled bad things, my sweet, pretty young lady. Death, and what not."

"But how it must frighten the people who are having them told!" cried Anna.

"Well, to speak the truth, young gentlefolks, when it's very bad I generally softens it over to 'em—say the cards is cloudy, or some-'at o' that," was the old woman's candid answer. "It don't do to make folks uneasy."

"Look here," said Helen, who had been to find the cards, "I should not like to hear it if it's anything bad."

"Ah, my dear young lady, I don't think *you* need fear any but a good fortune, with that handsome face and them bright eyes of yours," returned the old dame—who really seemed to speak, not in flattery, but from the bottom of her heart. "I don't know what the young lords 'ud be about to pass *you* by."

Helen liked that; she was just as vain as a peacock, and thought no little of herself. "Who'll begin?" asked she.

"Begin yoursef, Helen," said Tod. "It's sure to be something good."

So she shuffled and cut the cards as directed; and the old woman, sitting at the table, spread them out before her, talking a little bit to herself, and pointing with her finger here and there.

"You've been upon a journey lately," she said, "and you'll soon be going upon another." I give only the substance of what the old lady said, but it was interspersed freely with her own remarks. "You'll have a present before many days is gone; and you'll—stay, there's that black card—you'll hear of somebody that's sick. And—dear me! there's an offer for you—an offer of marriage—but it won't come to anything. Well, now, shuffle and cut again, please."

Helen did so. This was repeated three times in all. But, so far as we could understand it, her future seemed to be very uneventful—to have nothing in it—something like Miss Deveen's.

"It's a brave fortune as I thought, young lady," cried Mrs. Ness. "No trouble or care in store for you."

"But there's *nothing*," said Helen, too intently earnest to mind any of us. "When am I to be married?"

"Well, my dear, the cards haven't told so much this time. There'll be an offer, as I said—and I think a bit of trouble over it; but—"

"But you said it would not come to anything," interrupted Helen.

"Well, and no more it won't; leastways, it seemed so by the cards; and it seemed to bring a bother with it—old folks pulling one way maybe, and young 'uns the other. You'll have to wait for the right gentleman, my pretty miss."

"What stupid cards they are!" cried Helen, in dudgeon. "I dare say it's all rubbish."

"Any ways, you've had nothing bad," said the old woman. "And that's a priceless consolation."

"It's your turn now, Anna."

"I won't have mine told," said Anna. "I'm afraid."

"Oh, you senseless donkey!" cried Bill. "Afraid of a pack of cards!" So Anna laughed, and began.

"Ah, there's more here," said the old woman as she laid them out. "You are going through some great ceremony not long first. See here—crowds of people—and show. Is it a great ball, I wonder?"

"It may be my presentation," said Anna.

"And here's the wedding-ring!—and there's the gentleman! See! he's turning toward you; a dark man it is; and he'll be very fond of you, too!—and—"

"Oh, don't go on," cried Anna, in terrible confusion as she heard all this, and caught Tod's eye, and saw Bill on the broad

laugh. "Don't, pray don't; it must be all nonsense," she went on, blushing redder than a rose.

"But it's true," steadily urged the old lady. "There the wedding is. I don't say it'll be soon; perhaps not for some years; but come it will in its proper time. And you'll live in a fine big house; and—stay a bit—you'll have—"

Anna, half laughing, half crying, and her face redder than Dame Ness's fiery bow, pushed the cards together. "I won't be told any more," she said; "it must be all a pack of nonsense."

"Of course it is," added Helen, decisively. "And why couldn't you have told me all that, Mrs. Ness?"

"Why, my dear, sweet young lady, it isn't me that tells; it's the cards."

"I don't believe it. But it does to while away a wet and wretched afternoon. Now, Miss Carey."

Miss Carey looked up from her book with a start. "Oh, not me! Please, not me!"

"Not you!—the idea!" cried Helen. "Why, of course you must. I and my sister have had our turn, and you must take yours."

As if further objection were out of the question, Miss Carey stood timidly up by the table and shuffled the cards that Dame Ness handed to her. When they were spread out, the old woman looked at the cards longer than she had looked for either Helen or Anna, then at the girl, then at the cards again.

"There has been sickness; and trouble: and distress," she said at length. "And—and—'tain't over yet. I see a dark lady and a fair man: they've been in it, somehow. Seems to ha' been a great trouble—" putting the tips of her forefingers upon two cards. "Here you are, you see, right among it"—pointing to the Queen of Hearts. "I don't like the look of it. And there's money mixed up in the sorrow—"

A low, shuddering cry. I happened to be looking from the window at the moment, and turned to see Janet Carey with hands uplifted and a face of imploring terror. The cry came from her.

"Oh don't, don't! don't tell any more!" she implored. "I—was—not—guilty."

Down went her voice by little and little, down fell her hands; and down dropped she on the chair behind her. The next moment she was crying and sobbing. We stood round like so many helpless simpletons, quite put down by this unexpected interlude. Old Dame Ness stared, slowly shuffling the cards from hand to hand, and could not make it out.

"Here, I'll have my fortune told next, Mother Ness," said Bill Whitney, really out of good nature to the girl, that she might be left unobserved to recover herself. "Mind you promise me a good one."

"And so I will then, young gentleman, if the cards 'll let me," was the hearty answer. "Please shuffle 'em well, sir, and then cut 'em into three."

Bill was shuffling with all his might when we heard the front door open, and Cattledon's voice in the hall. "Oh, by George, I say,

what's to be done?" cried he. "She'll be fit to smother us. That old parson can't have given them a sermon."

Fortunately she stayed on the door-mat to take off her clogs. Dame Ness was scuffled down the kitchen stairs, and Bill hid the cards away in his pocket.

And until then it had not occurred to us that it might not be quite the right thing to go in for fortune telling on Good Friday.

II.

On Easter Tuesday William Whitney and Tod went off to Whitney Hall for a few days: Sir John wrote for them. In the afternoon Miss Deveen took Helen in the carriage to make calls; and the rest of us went to the Colosseum, in the Regent's Park. Cattledon rather fought against the expedition, but Miss Deveen did not listen to her. None of us—except herself—had seen it before: and I know that I, for one, was delighted with it.

The last scene of the performance was over. If I remember aright, at this distance of time, it was the representation of the falling of an avalanche on a Swiss village, to bury it forever in the snow; and we saw the little lighted church to which the terrified inhabitants were flying for succor, and heard the tinkling of its alarm-bell. As we pushed out with the crowd, a policeman appeared in our way, facing us, a tall, big, fierce-looking man; not to impede the advance of the throng, but to direct its movements. Janet Carey seized hold of my arm, and I turned to look at her. She stood something like a block of stone; her face white with terror, her eyes fixed on the policeman. I could not get her on, and we were stopping those behind. Naturally the man's eyes fell on her, and with evident recognition.

"Oh, it's you here, is it, Miss Carey!"

The tone was not exactly insolent: but it was cool and significant, wanting in respect. When I would have asked him how he dared so to address a young lady, the words were arrested by Janet. I thought she had gone mad.

"Oh, get me away, Mr. Ludlow, for Heaven's sake! Don't let him take me! Oh what shall I do? what shall I do?"

"What you've got to do is to get for'ard out o' this here passage and not block up the way," struck in the policeman. "I bain't after you now; so you've no call to be afeared this time. Pass on that way, sir."

I drew her onward, and in half a minute we were in the open air, clear of the throng. Cattledon, who seemed to have understood nothing, except that we had stopped the way, shook Janet by the arm in anger, and asked what had come to her.

"It was the same man, aunt, that Mrs. Knox called in," she gasped. "I thought he had come to London to look for me."

Miss Cattledon's answer was to keep hold of her arm, and whirl her along toward the outer gates. Anna and I followed in wonder.

"What is it all, Johnny?" she whispered.

"Goodness knows, Anna. I—"

Cattledon turned her head, asking me to go on and secure a cab.

Janet was helped into it and sat back with her eyes closed, a shiver taking her every now and then.

Janet appeared at dinner, and seemed as well as usual. In the evening Helen tore the skirt of her thin dress: and before she was aware, the girl was kneeling by the side of her chair with a needle and thread, beginning to mend it.

"You are very kind," said Helen heartily, when she saw what Janet was doing.

"Oh no," answered Janet, with an upward, self-depreciatory glance from her nice eyes.

But soon after that, when we were describing to Helen and Miss Deveen the sights at the Colosseum, and the silence of the buried village after the avalanche had fallen, Janet was taken with an ague fit. The very chair shook; it seemed that she must fall out of it. Anna ran to hold her. Miss Deveen got up in consternation.

"That Colosseum has been too much for her: there's nothing so fatiguing as sight-seeing. I did wrong in letting Janet go, as she is still weak from her illness. Perhaps she has taken cold."

Ringing the bell, Miss Deveen told George to make some hot wine and water. When it was brought in, she made Janet drink it, and sent her upstairs to bed, marshaled by Cattledon.

The next morning, Wednesday, I was dressing in the sunshine that streamed in at the bedroom windows, when a loud hulla-balloo was set up below, enough to startle the king and all his men.

"Thieves! robbers! murder!"

Dashing to the door, I looked over the balustrades. The shrieks and calls came from Lettice Lane, who was stumbling up the stairs from the hall. Cattledon opened her door in her night-cap, saw me, and shut it again with a bang.

"Murder! robbers! thieves!" shrieked Lettice.

"But what is it, Lettice?" I cried, leaping down.

"Oh, Mr. Johnny, the house is robbed!—and we might just as well all have been murdered in our beds!"

Everybody was appearing on the scene. Miss Deveen came fully dressed—she was often up before other people; Cattledon arrived in a white petticoat and shawl. The servants were running up from the kitchen.

Thieves had broken in during the night. The (so-called) breakfast-room at the back presented a scene of indescribable confusion. Everything in it was turned topsy-turvy; the secretary had been ransacked; the glass doors stood open to the garden.

It seemed that Lettice, in pursuance of her morning's duties, had gone to the room, and found it in this state. Lettice was of the excitable order, and went into shrieks. She stood now, sobbing and shaking, as she gave her explanation:

"When I opened the door and saw the room in this pickle, the window standing open, my very blood seemed to curdle within me. For all I knew the thieves might have done murder. Just look at the place, ma'am!—look at your secretary!"

It's what we were all looking at. The sight was as good as moving house. Chairs and footstools lay upside down, their chintz covers untied and flung off: the hearth-rug was under the table; books were open, periodicals scattered about; two pictures had been taken

from the wall and lay face downward; every ornament was moved from the mantel-piece. The secretary stood open; all its papers had been taken out, opened, and lay in a heap on the floor; and Janet Carey's well-stocked work-box was turned bottom upward, its contents having rolled anywhere.

"This must be your work, George," said Miss Cattledon, turning on the servant-man with a grim frown.

"Mine, ma'am!" he answered, amazed at the charge.

"Yes, yours," repeated Cattledon. "You could not have fastened the shutters last night; and that is how the thieves have got in."

"But I did, ma'am. I fastened them just as usual."

"Couldn't be," said Cattledon decisively, who had been making her way over the débris to examine the shutters. "They have not been forced in any way: they have simply been opened. The window also."

"And neither window nor shutters could be opened from the outside without force," remarked Miss Deveen. "I fear, George, you must have forgotten this room when you shut up last night."

"Indeed, ma'am, I did not forget it," was the respectful answer. "I assure you I bolted the window and barred the shutters as I always do."

Janet Carey, standing in mute wonder like the rest of us, testified to this. "When I came in here last night to get a needle and thread to mend Miss Whitney's dress, I am sure the shutters were shut: I noticed that they were."

Cattledon would not listen. She had taken up her own opinion of George's neglect, and sharply told Janet not to be so positive. Janet looked frightfully white and wan this morning, worse than a ghost.

'Oh, my goodness!" cried Helen Whitney, appearing on the scene. "If ever I saw such a thing!"

"I never did—in all my life," cried Cattledon.

"Have you lost any valuables from the secretary, Miss Deveen?"

"My dear Helen, there were no valuables in the secretary to lose," was Miss Deveen's answer. "Sometimes I keep money in it—a little, but last night there happened to be none. Of course the thieves could not know that, and must have been greatly disappointed. If they did not come in through the window—why, they must have got in elsewhere."

Miss Deveen spoke in a dubious tone, that too plainly showed her own doubts on the point. George felt himself and his word reflected upon.

"If I had indeed forgotten this window last night, ma'am—though for me to do such a thing seems next door to impossible—I would confess it at once. I can be upon my oath, ma'am, if put to it, that I made all secure here at dusk."

"Then, George, you had better look to your other doors and windows," was the reply of his mistress.

The other doors and windows were looked to: but no trace could be found of how the thieves got in. After breakfast, we succeeded in putting the room tolerably straight. The letters and bills took most time, for every one was lying open. And after it was all done, Miss Deveen came to the conclusion that nothing had been taken.

"Their object must have been money," she observed. "It is a good thing I happened to carry my cash-box upstairs yesterday. Sometimes I leave it here in the secretary."

"And was much in it?" one of us asked.

"Not very much. More, though, than one cares to lose: a little gold and a bank-note."

"A bank-note!" echoed Janet, repeating the words quickly. "*Is* it safe?—are you sure, ma'am, the note is safe?"

"Well, I conclude it is," answered Miss Deveen with composure. "I saw the cash-box before I came down this morning. I did not look inside it."

"Oh, but you had better look," urged Janet, betraying some excitement. "Suppose it should be gone! Can *I* look, ma'am?"

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Helen. "If the cash-box is safe, the money must be safe inside it. The thieves did not go into Miss Deveen's room, Janet Carey."

The servants wanted the police called in; but their mistress saw no necessity for it. Nothing had been carried off, she said, and therefore she should take no further trouble. Her private opinion was that George, in spite of his assertions, must have forgotten the window.

It seemed a curious thing that the thieves had not visited other rooms. Unless, indeed, the door of this one had been locked on the outside, and they were afraid to risk the noise of forcing it: and no one could tell whether the key had been turned or not. George had the plate-basket in his bed-chamber; but on the sideboard in the dining-room stood a silver tea-caddy and a small silver waiter: how was it they had not walked off with these two articles? Or, as the cook said, why didn't they rifle her larder? She had various tempting things in it, including a fresh-boiled ham.

"Janet Carey has been ill all the afternoon," observed Anna, when I and Helen got home before dinner, for we had been out with Miss Deveen. "I think she feels frightened about the thieves, for one thing."

"Ill for nothing!" returned Helen slightingly. "Why should she be frightened any more than we are? The thieves did not hurt her. I might just as well say I am ill."

"But she has been really ill, Helen. She has a shivering fit one minute and is sick the next. Cattledon says she must have caught cold yesterday, and is cross with her for catching it."

"Look here," said Helen, lowering her voice. "I can't get it out of my head that that old fortune-teller must have had to do with it. She must have seen the secretary and may have taken note of the window fastenings. I am in a state over it: as you both know, it was I who had her up."

Janet did not come down until after dinner. She was pale and quiet, but not less ready than ever to do what she could for everybody. Helen had brought home some ferns to—transfer, I think she called it. Janet at once offered to help her. The process involved a large washhand-basin full of water, and Miss Deveen sent the two girls into the breakfast-parlor, not to make a mess in the drawing-room.

"Well, my dears," said Miss Deveen, when she had read the

chapter before bed-time, "I hope you will all sleep well to-night, and that we shall be undisturbed by thieves. Not that they disturbed us last night," she added, laughing. "Considering all things, I'm sure they were as polite and considerate thieves as we could wish to have to do with."

Whether the others slept well I can not say: I know I did. So well that I never woke at all until the same cries from Lettice disturbed the house as on the previous morning. The thieves had been in again.

Down-stairs we went, as quickly as some degree of dressing allowed, and found the breakfast-parlor all confusion, the servants all consternation: the window open as before; the furniture turned about, the ornaments and pictures moved from their places, the books scattered, the papers of the secretary lying unfolded in a heap on the carpet, and a pair of embroidered slippers of Helen Whitney's lying in the washhand-basin of water.

"What an extraordinary thing!" exclaimed Miss Deveen, while the rest of us stood in silent amazement.

Lettice's tale was the same as the previous one. Upon proceeding to the room to put it to rights, she found it thus, and its shutters and glass doors wide open. There was no trace, except here, of the possible entrance or exit of thieves: all other fastenings were secure as they had been left overnight; other rooms had not been disturbed; and, more singular than all, nothing appeared to have been taken. What could the thieves be seeking for?

"Shall you call in the police now, ma'am?" asked Cattledon, her tone implying that they ought to have been called in before.

"Yes, I shall," emphatically replied Miss Deveen.

"Oh!" shrieked Helen, darting in, after making a hasty and impromptu toilet, "look at my new slippers!"

After finishing the ferns last night they had neglected to send the basin away. The slippers were rose-colored, worked with white flowers in floss silk; and the bits of loose green from the ferns floated over them like green weeds on a pond. Helen had bought them when we were out yesterday.

"My beautiful slippers!" lamented Helen. "I wish to goodness I had not fogotten to take them upstairs. What wicked thieves they must be! They ought to be hung."

"It's to know, mum, whether it *was* thieves," spoke the cook.

"Why, what else can it have been, cook?" asked Miss Deveen.

"Mum, I don't pretend to say. I've knowed cats do queer things. We've got two on 'em—the old cat and her kitten."

"Did you ever know cats unlock a secretary and take out the papers, cook?" returned Miss Deveen.

"Well no, mum. But, on the other hand, I never knowed thieves break into a house two nights running, and both times go away empty-handed."

The argument was unanswerable. Unless the thieves had been disturbed on each night, how was it they had taken nothing?

Miss Deveen locked the door upon the room just as it was; and after breakfast sent George to the nearest police-station. While he was gone I was alone in the dining-room, stooping down to hunt

for a book in the lowest shelf of the book-case, when Janet Carey came in followed by Cattledon. I suppose the table-cover hid me from them, for Cattledon began to blow her up.

"One would think you were a troubled ghost, shaking and shivering in that way, first upstairs and then down! The police coming! —what if they are? They are not coming after you this time. There's no money missing now."

Janet burst into tears. "Oh, aunt, why do you speak so to me? It is as though you believed me guilty!"

"Don't be a simpleton, Janet," rebuked Cattledon in a softer tone. "If I did not know you were not, and could not be, guilty, should I have brought you here under Miss Deveen's roof? What vexes me so much is to see you look as though you were guilty—with your white face, and your hysterics, and your trembling hands and lips. Get a little spirit into yourself, child: the police won't harm you."

Catching up the keys from the table, she went out again, leaving Janet sobbing. I stood forward. She started when she saw me, and tried to dry her eyes.

"I am sorry, Miss Carey, that all this bother is affecting you. Why are you so sad?"

"I—have gone through a great deal of trouble lately;—and been ill," she answered, with hesitation, arresting her sobs.

"Can I do anything for you?—help you in any way?"

"You are very kind, Mr. Ludlow; you have been kind to me all along. There's nothing any one can do. Sometimes I wish I could die."

"Die!"

"There is so much unhappiness in the world!"

George's voice was heard in the hall with the policeman. Janet vanished. But whether it was through the floor or out at the door, I declare I did not see then, and don't quite know to this day.

I and Cattledon were allowed to assist at the conference between Miss Deveen and the policeman: a dark man with a double chin and stripes on his coat sleeve. After hearing particulars, and examining the room and the mess it was in, he inquired how many servants were kept, and whether Miss Deveen had confidence in them. She told him the number, and said she had confidence in all.

He went into the kitchen, put what questions he pleased to the servants, looked at the fastenings of the doors generally, examined the outside of the window and walked about the garden. George called him Mr. Stone—which appeared to be his name. Mr. Stone had nothing of a report to bring Miss Deveen.

"It's one of two things, ma'am," he said. "Either this has been done by somebody in your own house; or else the neighbors are playing tricks upon you. I can't come to any conclusion. The case is peculiar, you see, in so far as that nothing has been stolen."

"It is very peculiar indeed," returned Miss Deveen.

"I should have said—I should feel inclined to say—that the culprit is some one in the house—"

"It's the most unlikely thing in the world, that it should have

been anybody in the house," struck in Miss Deveen, not allowing him to go on. "To suspect any of the young people who are visiting me, would be simply an insult. And my servants would no more play the trick than I or Miss Cattledon would play it."

"Failing in-doors then, we must look out," said Mr. Stone, after listening patiently. "And that brings up more difficulty, ma'am. For I confess I don't see how they could get the windows and shutters open from the outside, and leave no marks of damage."

"The fact of the window and shutters being wide open each morning, shows how they got out."

"Just so," said Mr. Stone; "but it does not show how they got in. Of course there's the possibility that they managed to secrete themselves in the house beforehand."

"Yesterday I thought that might have been the case," remarked Miss Deveen; "to-day I do not think so. It seems that, after what occurred, my servants were especially cautious to keep their doors and windows not only closed but bolted all day yesterday, quite barring the possibility of any one's stealing in. Except, of course, down the chimneys."

Mr. Stone laughed. "They'd bring a lot of soot with 'em that way."

"And spoil my hearth-rugs. No; that was not the way of entrance."

"Then we come to the question—did one of the servants get up and admit 'em?"

"But that would be doubting my servants still, you see. It really seems, Mr. Stone, as though you could not help me."

"Before saying whether I can or I can't, I should be glad, ma'am, to have a conversation with you alone," was the unexpected answer.

So we left him with Miss Deveen. Cattledon's stays appeared to resent it, for they creaked alarmingly in the hall, and her voice was tart.

"Perhaps the man wants to accuse you or me, Mr. Johnny!"

We knew later, after the upshot came, what it was he did want; and I may as well state it at once. Stone had made up his mind to watch that night in the garden; but he wished it kept secret from everybody, except Miss Deveen herself, and he charged her strictly not to mention it. "How will it serve you, if, as you say, they do not come in that way?" she had asked. "But the probability is they come out that way," he answered. "At any rate, they fling the doors open, and I shall be there to drop upon them."

Janet Carey grew very ill as the day went on. Lettice offered to sit up with her, in case she wanted anything in the night. Janet had just the appearance of somebody worn out.

We went to bed at the usual time, quite unconscious that Mr. Stone had taken up his night-watch in the summer-house at the end of the garden. The nights were very bright just then; the moon at about the full. Nothing came of it: neither the room nor the window was disturbed.

"They scented my watch," remarked the officer in private next morning to Miss Deveen. "However, ma'am, I don't think it

likely you will be troubled again. Seeing you've put it into our hands, they'll not dare to risk further annoyance."

"I suppose not—if they know it," dubiously spoke Miss Deveen.

He shook his head. "They know as much as that, ma'am. Depend upon it, their little game is over."

Mr. Stone was mistaken. On the following morning, the breakfast-room was found by Lettice in exactly the same state of confusion. The furniture dragged about, the ornaments moved from the mantel-piece, the bills and papers opened, as before. Miss Deveen was very silent over it, and said in the hearing of the servants that she should have to carry the grievance to Scotland Yard.

And I'm sure I thought she set out to do it. The carriage came to the door in the course of the morning. Miss Deveen, who was ready dressed, passed over the others, and asked me to go with her.

"Do you know what I'm going to do, Johnny?" she questioned, as George took his place on the box and the fat old coachman gave the word to his horses.

"I think I do, Miss Deveen. We are going to Scotland Yard."

"Not a bit of it, Johnny," she said. "My opinion has come around to Mr. Policeman Stone's—that we must look in-doors for the disturber. I have brought you out with me to talk of it. It is a great mystery—for I thought I could have trusted the servants and all the rest of you with my life."

It was a mystery—and no mistake.

"A great mystery," repeated Miss Deveen; "a puzzle: and I want you to help me to unravel it, Johnny. I intend to sit up to-night in the breakfast-parlor. But not being assured of my nerves while watching in solitude for thieves, or ghosts, or what not, I wish you to sit up with me."

"Oh, I shall like it, Miss Deveen."

"I have heard of houses being disturbed before in a similar manner," she continued. "There was a story in the old days of the Cock Lane ghost; I think that was something of the same kind, but my memory is rather cloudy on the point. Other cases I know have been traced to the sudden mania, solely mischievous or otherwise, of some female inmate. I hope it will not turn out to have been Lettice herself."

"Shall I watch without you, Miss Deveen?"

"No, no; you will bear me company. We will make our arrangements now, Johnny—for I do not intend that any soul shall know of this; not even Miss Cattledon. You will keep counsel, mind, like the true and loyal knight you are."

The house had gone to rest. In the dark breakfast-room sat Miss Deveen and I, side by side. The fire was dying away, and it gave scarcely any light. We sat back against the wall between the fireplace and the door, she in one arm-chair, I in another. The secretary was opposite the fire, the key in the lock as usual; the window, closed and barred, lay to the left, the door to the right, a table in the middle. An outline of the objects was just discernible in the fading light.

"Do you leave the key in the secretary as a rule, Miss Deveen?" I asked in a whisper.

"Yes. There's nothing in it that anybody would care to look at," she replied in the same cautious tone. "My cash-box is generally there, but that is always locked. But I think we had better not talk, Johnny."

So we sat on in silence. The faint light of the fire died away, giving place to total darkness. It was weary watching there, hour after hour, each hour seeming like an age. Twelve o'clock struck; one; two! I'd have given something to be at liberty to fall asleep. Just to speak a word to Miss Deveen would be a relief, and I forgot her injunctions.

"Are you thinking of ghosts, Miss Deveen?"

"Just then I was thinking of God, Johnny. How good it is to know that He is with us in the dark as in the light."

Almost with the last word, my ears, younger and quicker than Miss Deveen's, caught the sound of a faint movement outside—as though steps were descending the stairs. I touched Miss Deveen's arm and breathed a caution.

"I hear something. I think it is coming now."

The door softly opened. Some white figure was standing there—as might be seen by the glimmer of light that came in through the passage window. Who or what it was, we could not gather. It shut the door behind it, and came slowly gliding along the room on the other side the table, evidently feeling its way as it went, and making for the window. We sat in breathless silence. Miss Deveen had caught my hand and was holding it in hers.

Next, the shutters were unfastened and slowly folded back; then the window was unbolted and its doors were flung wide. This let in a flood of moonlight: after the darkness the room seemed bright as day. And the white figure doing all this was—Janet Carey in her night-gown, her feet bare.

Whether Miss Deveen held my hand the tighter, or I hers, I dare say neither of us could tell. Janet's eyes turned on us, as we sat; and I fully expected her to go into a succession of shrieks.

But no. She took no manner of notice. It was just as though she did not see us. Steadily, methodically as it seemed, she proceeded to search the room, apparently looking for something. First she took the chintz cover off the nearest chair, and shook it out; turned over the chair and felt it all over; a small round stand was served the same; a blotting-case that happened to lie on the table she carried to the window, knelt down, and examined it on the floor by the moonlight, passing her fingers over its few pages, unfolding a letter that was inside and shaking it out to the air. Then all that was left on the floor, and she turned over another chair, and so went on.

I felt as cold as charity. Was it her ghost that was doing this? How was it she did not see us sitting there? Her eyes were open enough to see anything!

Coming to the secretary, she turned the key, and began her search in it. Pulling out one drawer first; she opened every paper it contained, shook them one by one, and let them drop on to the floor. As she was commencing at the next drawer, her back toward us, Miss Deveen whispered to me,

"We will get away, Johnny. You go on first. No noise, mind."

We got out without being seen or heard. At least, there was no outcry; no sign to tell we had been. Miss Deveen drew me into the dining-room; her face, as it caught the glimmer, entering by the fan-light over the hall door, looked deadly pale.

"I understand it all, Johnny. She is doing it in her sleep."

"In her sleep?"

"Yes. She is unconscious. It was better to come away. As she came round to search in our part of the room, she might have found us, and awoke. That would have been dangerous."

"But, Miss Deveen, what is she searching for?"

"I know. I see it all perfectly. It is for a bank-note."

"But—if she is really asleep, how can she go about the search in that systematic way? Her eyes are wide open: she seems to examine things as though she *saw* them."

"I can not tell you how it is, Johnny. They do seem to see things, though they are asleep. What's more, when they awake there remains no consciousness of what they have done. This is not the first case of somnambulism I have been an eye-witness to. She throws the window and shutters open to admit the light."

"How can she have the sense to know in her sleep that the opening of them will admit it?"

"Johnny, though these things *are*, I can not explain them. Go up to your bed now and get to sleep. As I shall go to mine. You shall know about Janet in the morning. She will take no harm if left alone: she has taken none hitherto. Say nothing to any one."

It was the solution of the great puzzle. Janet Carey had done it all in her sleep. And what she had been searching for was a bank-note.

In the situation where Janet had been living as nursery governess, a bank-note had disappeared. Janet was suspected and *accused* of taking it. Constitutionally timid and nervous, her spirits long depressed by circumstances, the accusation had a grave effect upon her. She searched the house for it incessantly, almost night and day, just as we had seen her searching the parlor at Miss Deveen's in her sleep, and then fell into a fever—which was only saved by great care from settling on the brain. When well enough, Miss Cattledon had her removed to London to Miss Deveen's; but the stigma still clung to her, and the incipient fever seemed still to hover about her. The day William Whitney left, she moved from Miss Cattledon's chamber to the one he had occupied: and that night, being unrestrained, she went down in her sleep to search. The situation of the room in which the note had been lost was precisely similar to this breakfast-room at Miss Deveen's—in her troubled sleep, poor girl, she must have taken it for the same room, and crept down, still asleep, to renew the endless search she had formerly made when awake. The night the policeman was watching in the summer-house, Lettice sat up with Janet; so that night nothing occurred. Lettice said afterward that Miss Carey twice got out of bed in her sleep and seemed to be making for the door, but Lettice guided her back to bed again. And so there was

the elucidation; and Janet was just as unconscious of what she had done as the bed-post.

Miss Deveen's medical man was called in, for brain-fever, escaped, appeared to be fastening on Janet in earnest now. He gave it as his opinion that she was no natural sleep-walker, but that the mind's disturbance had so acted on the brain and system, coupled with her fright at meeting the policeman at the Colosseum, as to have induced the result. At any rate, whatever may have caused it, and strange though it was, I have only given facts. And in the next paper we shall hear more about the bank-note.

JANET CAREY.

THE LOSS.

I.

It was a summer's evening, some two years or so previous to the events told of in the last chapter, and the sun was setting in clouds of crimson and gold. On the green lawn at the back of Rose Villa —a pretty detached house, about twenty minutes' walk from the town of Lefford—sat a lady in a gay dress. She was dark and plain, with crinkled black hair, and a rough voice. A girl of twelve, fair, pretty, and not in the least like her, sat on the same bench. Three younger girls were scampering about at some noisy play; and a boy, the youngest of all, lay on the grass, whistling, and knotting a whip-cord. The sun's slanting rays tinted all with a warm hue: the white walls of the house and its clear glass windows; the smooth lawn and its surrounding shrubs and flowers, the bright clothes of the lady and children: putting one in mind of a scene in Fairyland.

"Get up, Dicky," said the lady to the boy.

Dicky, aged five, whistled on, without taking any manner of notice.

"Did you hear mamma tell you to get up, Dicky?" spoke the fair girl by her mother's side. "Get up, sir."

"Sha'n't," said Dicky.

"*You* go in for me, Mina," said Mrs. Knox. "I want to know the time. Arnold took my watch into town this morning to have the spring mended."

Mina seemed in no more hurry to obey than Dicky was. Just then a low pony-chaise, driven by a boy-groom, rattled out from the stable-yard at the side of the house. Mina looked across at it.

"It must be about a quarter past eight," she said. "You told James not to be later than that in going to the station."

"You might go and see," spoke Mrs. Knox: "James is not sure to be to time. How *glad* I shall be when that governess is here to take the trouble of you children off me!" she added, fretfully. Mina did not take the hint about going in: she made off to her sisters instead.

This house had once been a doctor's residence. Soon after Thomas Knox, surgeon and apothecary, set up in practice at Lefford, now five-and-twenty years ago, he married Mary Arnold. Rose Villa was hers, and some money besides, and they came to live at it, Mr. Knox keeping on his surgery in Lefford. They had

one son, who was named Arnold. When Arnold was ten years old, his mother died. A year later his father married a second wife, Miss Amelia Carey: after which these five other young ones came to town. Arnold was to be a doctor like his father. His studies were in progress, when one morning a letter came to him in London—where he was walking Bartholomew's Hospital under that clever man, William Lawrence—saying that his father was alarmingly ill. Arnold reached Lefford just in time to see him die. The little one, Dicky, was a baby then in long clothes. Arnold was only nineteen. No chance that he could set up in, and keep together the practice, which fell through. So he went back to London to study on, and pass, and what not; and by and by he came down again Dr. Knox: for he had followed the fashion just then getting common, of taking the M.D. degree. Arnold Knox had his share of good plain sense, and of earnestness too; but example is contagious, and he only followed that of his fellow-students in going in thus early for the degree. He arrived at Lefford "Dr. Knox." Mr. Tamlyn laughed at him, before his face and behind his back, asking him what experience he had had that he should hasten to tack on M.D. to his name: why, not more experience than a country apothecary's apprentice. Arnold, feeling half ashamed of himself, for he was very modest, pleaded the new custom. Custom! returned old Tamlyn; in *his* days medical men had *worked* for their honors before taking them. Arnold engaged himself as assistant to Mr. Tamlyn, who had dropped into the best part of Dr. Knox's practice since that gentleman's death, in addition to his own.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Knox, the widow, had continued to live at Rose Villa. It belonged to Arnold, having descended to him in right of his mother. Mr. Knox had bequeathed by will five hundred pounds to Arnold for the completion of his studies; and all the rest of his money to his wife and second family. Lefford talked of it resentfully, saying it was an unjust will: for a good portion of the money had been Mary Arnold's and ought to have gone to her son. It was about three hundred and fifty pounds a year in all; and Mrs. Knox bewailed and bemoaned her hard fate at having to bring up her children upon so little. She was one of those who *must* spend; and her extravagance had kept her husband poor, in spite of his good practice.

Never a hint did she offer her step-son of paying him rent for his house; never a word of thanks did she tender for the use of it.

Arnold said nothing: he was thoroughly warm-hearted, generous-natured, considering everybody before himself, and he would not have hurt her feelings or cramped her pocket for the world. As long as he did not want the house, she and his half-sisters and brother were welcome to it. When he came back from London he naturally went to it; it was his home; and Mrs. Knox did not at all like the addition he made to her housekeeping expenses: which could not be very much amid the nine others to provide for. The very day after Arnold's bargain was made with Mr. Tamlyn, she asked him how much he was going to pay her for his board. Half his salary, Arnold promptly replied; seventy-five pounds a year. And Mrs. Knox would have liked to say it was not enough.

"Five-and-seventy pounds a year!" cackled Lefford, when it got

hold of the news. "Why, it won't cost her half that. And she using his house and enjoying all the money that was his poor mother's! Well, she has a conscience, that Widow Knox!"

The arrangement had continued until now. Three years had elapsed since, and Arnold was four-and twenty. Mrs. Knox found herself often in money difficulties; when she would borrow from Arnold, and never think of repaying him. She was now going to increase expenses by taking a nursery governess. Awfully tiresome those children were, and Mrs. Knox said they wore her out. She should have managed the little brats better: not indulged and neglected them by turns. One hour she'd let them run wild, the next hour was shrieking at them in words next door to swearing.

The governess engaged was a distant relative of her own, a Miss Janet Carey. She was an orphan, and had for a year or two been teacher in a boys' preparatory school, limited to thirty pupils. Mrs. Knox wrote to offer her twelve pounds a year and a "very comfortable home at Rose Villa; to be as one of the family." It must have sounded tempting to Miss Carey after the thirty little boys, and she gratefully accepted it. Mrs. Knox had never seen her; she pictured to herself a tall, bony young woman with weak eyes, for that had been the portrait of her second cousin, Miss Carey's father.

"Crack! crack! Tally-ho! tally-ho!" shouted Dicky, who had completed his whip, and got up to stamp and smack it. "Yo-ho! Tally-ho, tally-ho!"

"Oh, do for goodness' sake be quiet, Dick!" screamed Mrs. Knox. "I can't have that noise now: I told you I had a headache. Do you hear me, then! Mina, come and take away this horrible whip."

Mina came running at the call. Master Dicky was so much given way to as a general rule, that to thwart him seemed to his sisters something delightful. Dicky dodged out of harm's way amid the shrubs; and Mina was about to go after him, when some one came through the open glass doors of what was called the garden-room.

"Here's Arnold," she cried.

Dr. Knox was a tall, strong-built, fair man, looking older than his four-and-twenty years. Nobody could help liking his thin face, for it was a *good* face, full of sense and thought, but it was not a handsome one. His complexion was sallow, and his light hair had a habit of standing up wild.

"You are home betimes," remarked Mrs. Knox.

"Yes; there was nothing more to do," he answered, sitting down in a rustic garden-chair. "I met James in the pony-chaise: where's he gone?"

"Why, Arnold, don't you know that the governess is coming this evening?" cried the second girl, Lotty, who was fanning her hot face with a cabbage-leaf. "James is gone to the station for her."

"I forgot all about the governess," said Dr. Knox. "Lotty, what a heat you are in!"

"We have been running races," said the child; "and the sun was blazing."

Dicky came tearing up. Something had happened to the whip.

"Look at it, Arnold," he said, throwing his arms and the whip on the doctor's knees. "The lash won't stay on."

"And you want me to mend it, I suppose."

"Yes. Do it now."

"Is that the way to ask?"

"Please do it now, Arnold."

"If I can. But I fear I can't, Dicky."

"No! You can mend arms and legs."

"Sometimes. Have you a strip of leather? Or some twine?"

Dicky pulled a piece of string out of some unfathomable pocket. He was not promoted to trousers yet, but wore white drawers reaching to the knee and a purple velvet tunic. Dr. Knox took out his penknife.

"What's the matter with that young Tamlyn again?" asked Mrs. Knox in a fretful tone.

"With Bertie?" returned Dr. Knox, rather carelessly, for he was intent on the whip. "It is one of the old attacks."

"Of course! I knew it was nothing more," spoke Mrs. Knox in resentment. "There was to have been a party at Mrs. Green's this evening. Just as I was ready to start for it, her footman came to say it was put off on account of Miss Tamlyn, who could not come because Master Albert was ill."

"Miss Tamlyn would not leave Bertie when he is ill for all the parties in Christendom, mother."

"Miss Tamlyn is welcome to stay with him. But that's no reason why Mrs. Green should have put the rest of us off. Who's Bessy Tamlyn, that she should be considered before everybody?—stupid old maid!"

Mrs. Knox pushed up her lace sleeves in wrath, and jingled her bracelets. Evening parties made the solace of her life.

The wheels of the returning chaise were heard, and the children went rushing round to the front of the house to look at the new governess. They brought Janet Carey back to the lawn. Mrs. Knox saw a small, slight young girl with a quiet, nice face and very simple manners. Dr. Knox rose. Mrs. Knox did not rise. Expecting to see a kind of dark strong giantess, she was struck with astonishment and remained sitting.

"You are surely not Matthew Carey's daughter!"

"Yes, madam, I am," was the young lady's answer, as a blush stole into the clear, meek face.

"Dear me! I should never have thought it. Mat Carey was as tall and big as a lamp-post. And—why!—you told me you were twenty-three!"

"I was twenty-three last March."

"Well, I trust you will be found competent to manage my children. I had no idea you were so young-looking."

The tone expressed a huge doubt of it. The ill-trained youngsters stood staring rudely into Miss Carey's face. Dr. Knox, pushing some of them aside, held out his hand with a smile of welcome.

"I hope you will be able to feel at home here, Miss Carey," he said: "the children must not be allowed to give you too much trouble. Have you had a pleasant journey?"

"Take Miss Carey to her room, Mina," sharply struck in Mrs.

Knox, not at all pleased that her step-son should presume to say so much: as if the house were his. And Mina, followed by the shy and shrinking young governess, went in-doors and up to the roof, and showed her a little comfortless chamber there.

(But the reader must understand that in writing this paper, I, Johnny Ludlow, am at a disadvantage. Not having been present myself at Lefford, I can only relate at second-hand what happened at Mrs. Knox's.)

The time went on. Janet Carey proved herself equal to her work: although Mrs. Knox, judging by her young look and gentle manners, had been struck by a doubt of her capacity, and politely expressed it aloud. Janet's duties were something like the labors of Hercules: at least, as varied. Teaching was only one of them. She helped to dress and undress the children, or did it entirely if Sally the house-maid forgot to attend; she kept all the wardrobes and mended the clothes and the socks. She had to be in all places at once. Helping Mrs. Knox in the parlor, taking messages to the kitchen, hearing the girls' lessons, and rushing out to the field to see that Dicky was not worrying the pony or milking the cow on his own account. It was not an orderly household; two maids were kept, and James. Mrs. Knox had no talent for management, and was frightfully lazy besides; and Janet, little foreseeing what additional labor she would bring on herself, took to remedy as far as she could the short-comings and confusion. Mrs. Knox saw her value, and actually thanked her. As a reward, she made Janet her own attendant, her secretary, and her partial housekeeper. Mrs. Knox's hair, coarse and stiff, was rather difficult hair to manage; in the morning it was let go anyhow, and Janet dressed it in the afternoon. Janet wrote Mrs. Knox's letters; kept her accounts; paid the bills—paid them, that is, when she could get the money. Janet, you perceive, was made Jack-of-all-trades at Rose Villa. She was conscious that it was hardly fair, but she did it cheerfully; and, as Mrs. Knox would say, it was all in the day's work.

The only one who showed consideration for Miss Carey was Dr. Knox. He lectured the children about giving her so much unnecessary trouble: he bribed Dicky with lozenges and licorice from the surgery drawers not to kick or spit at her; and he was, himself, ever kind and considerate to her. They only met at dinner and tea, for Dr. Knox snatched a scrambling breakfast (the servants never got it ready for him in time), and went off betimes to Lefford. Now and then he would come home tolerably early in the evening, but he had a great deal to do, and it did not happen often. Mr. Tamlyn was the parish doctor, and it gave Dr. Knox an incessant round of tramping: for the less pleasant division of the daily professional work was turned over to him.

They got to have a fellow-feeling for one another—Janet and Dr. Knox—a kind of mutual, inward sympathy. Both of them were overworked; in the lot of each was less of comfort than might have been. Dr. Knox compassionated Janet's hard place and the want of poetry in her life. Janet felt hurt to see him made so little of at home, and she knew about the house being his property,

and the seventy-five pounds a year he paid for the liberty of living in it—and she knew that most of the income enjoyed by Mrs. Knox ought to have been Arnold's income. His breakfast was scanty; a cup of coffee, drunk standing, and some thick bread and butter eaten as he went along the road to Lefford. Or he would be off by cock-crow without chance of breakfast, unless he cut a slice of bread in the pantry; or perhaps would have to be out all night. Sometimes he would get home to dinner; one o'clock; more often it was two o'clock, or half past, or three. In that case, Sally would bring in a plate of half-cold scraps for him—anything that happened to be left. Once, when Janet was carving a leg of mutton, she asked leave to cut off a slice or two that they might be kept warm for the doctor; but Mrs. Knox blew her up—a fine trouble *that* would be! As to tea, the chances were, if he came in to it at all, that the tea-pot would be drained: upon which, some half-cold water would be dashed in, and the loaf and butter pushed before him. Dr. Knox took it all quietly: perhaps he saw how useless complaint would be.

Mr. Tamlyn's was a large, red-brick, handsome house, standing in a beautiful garden, in the best and widest street of Lefford. The surgery, built on the side of the house, consisted of two rooms: one contained the drugs and the scales, and so on; the other was where the better class of patients waited. Mr. Tamlyn's wife was dead, and he had one son, who was a cripple. Poor Bertie was thrown down by his nurse when he was a child; he had hardly ever been out of pain since; sometimes the attacks were very bad. It made him more cross and fractious than a stranger would believe; rude, in fact, and self-willed. Mr. Tamlyn just worshiped Bertie. He only lived to one end—that of making money for Bertie, after he, himself, should be gone. Miss Bessy, Mr. Tamlyn's half-sister, kept his house, and she was the only one who tried to keep down Bertie's temper. Lefford thought it odd that Mr. Tamlyn did not raise Dr. Knox's salary; but it was known he wanted to put by what he could for Bertie.

The afternoon sun streamed full on the surgery window, and Dr. Knox, who had just pelted back from dinner, stood behind the counter, making up bottles of physic. Mr. Tamlyn had an apprentice, a young fellow named Dockett, but he could not be trusted with the physic department yet, as he was apt to serve out calomel powder for camomile blows. Of the three poor parish patients, waiting for their medicine, two sat and one stood, there not being a third chair. The doctor spoke very kindly to them about their ailments; he always did that; but he did not seem well himself and often put his hand to his throat and chest.

The physic and the parish patients done with, he went into the other room, and threw himself into the easy-chair. "I wonder what's the matter with me?" he said to himself: and then he got up again, for Mr. Tamlyn was coming in. He was a short man with a gray face, and iron-gray hair.

"Arnold," said he, "I wish you'd take my round this afternoon. There are only three or four people who need be seen, and the carriage is at the door."

"Is Bertie worse than usual?" asked Arnold; who knew that every impediment in Mr. Tamlyn's was caused by Bertie.

"He is in a great deal of pain. I really don't care to leave him."

"Oh, I'll go with pleasure," replied Arnold, passing into the surgery to get his hat.

Mr. Tamlyn walked with him across the flagged court to the gate, talking of the sick people he was going to see. Arnold got into the brougham and was driven away. When he returned, Mr. Tamlyn was upstairs in Bertie's sitting-room. Arnold went there.

"Anything more come in?" he asked. "Or can the brougham be put up?"

"Dear me, yes; here's a note from Mrs. Stephenson," said Mr. Tamlyn, replying to the first question. And he spoke testily: for Mrs. Stephenson was a lady of seventy, who always insisted on his own attendance, objecting to Dr. Knox on the score of his youth. "Well, you must go for once, Arnold. If she grumbles, tell her I was out."

On the sofa in the room lay Albert Tamlyn; a lad of sixteen with a fretful countenance and rumpled hair. Miss Tamlyn, a pleasant-looking lady of thirty-five, sat by the sofa at work. Arnold Knox went up to the boy, speaking with the utmost gentleness.

"Bertie, my boy, I am sorry you are in pain to-day."

"Who said I was in pain?" retorted Bertie, ungraciously, his voice as squeaky as a penny trumpet.

"Why, Bertie, you know you are in sad pain; it was I who told Dr. Knox so," interposed the father.

"Then you had no business to tell him so," shrieked Bertie, with a hideous grin of resentment. "What is it to him?—or to you?—or to anybody?"

"Oh, Bertie, Bertie!" whispered Miss Tamlyn. "Oh, my boy, you should not give way like this."

"You just give your tongue a holiday, Aunt Bessy," fired Bertie. "I can't be bothered by you all in this way."

Dr. Knox, looking down at him, saw something wrong in the position he was lying in. He stooped, lifted him quietly in his strong arms, and altered it.

"There, Bertie, you will be better now."

"No, I'm not better, and why d'you interfere?" retorted Bertie in his temper, and burst out crying. It was weary work, waiting on that lad; the house had a daily benefit of it. He had always been given way to; his whims were studied, his tempers went unreproved, and no patience was taught him.

Dr. Knox drove to Mrs. Stephenson's. He dismissed the carriage when he came out; for he had some patients to see on his own score among the poor, and went on to them. They were at tea at Mr. Tamlyn's when he got back. He looked very ill, and sat down at once.

"Are you tired, Arnold?" asked the surgeon.

"Not very; but I feel out of sorts. My throat is rather painful."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Not much, I dare say. A little ulcerated perhaps."

"I'll have a look at it presently. Bessy, give Dr. Knox a cup of tea."

"Thank you, I shall be glad of it," interposed the doctor. It was not often he took a meal in the house, not liking to intrude on

them. When he went up this evening he had thought the tea was over.

"We are later than usual," said Miss Tamlyn, in answer to some remark he made. "Bertie dropp d asleep."

Bertie was awake, and eating relays of bread and butter as he lay speaking to nobody. The handsome sitting-rooms down-stairs were nearly deserted: Mr. Tamlyn could not bear even to take his meals away from Bertie.

It was growing dusk when Dr. Knox went home. Mr. Tamlyn told him to take a cooling draught and to go to bed early. Mrs. Knox was out for the evening. Janet Carey sat at the old piano in the school-room, singing songs to the children to keep them quiet. They were crowding round her, and nobody saw him enter the room.

Janet happened to be singing the very song she sung later to us that night at Miss Deveen's—"Blow, blow, thou wintry wind." Although she had now been at Rose Villa nearly a twelvemonth, for early summer had come round again, Dr. Knox had never heard her sing. Mrs. Knox hated singing altogether, and especially despised Janet's: it was only when Janet was alone with the children that she ventured on it, hoping to keep them still. Arnold Knox sat in utter silence; entranced; just as we were at Miss Deveen's.

"You sing 'I've been roaming,' now," called out Dicky, before the song was well over.

"No, not that thing," dissented Mina. "Sing 'Pray, Goody,' Janet." They had long since called her by her Christian name.

The whole five (the other three taking sides), not being able to agree, plunged at once into a hot dispute. Janet in vain tried to make peace by saying she would sing both songs, one after the other: they did not listen to her. In the midst of the noise, Sally looked in to say James had caught a magpie; and the lot scampered off.

Janet Carey heaved a sad sigh, and passed her hand over her weary brow. She had had a tiring day: there were times when she thought her duties would get beyond her. Rising to follow the rebellious flock, she caught sight of Dr. Knox, seated back in the wide old cane chair.

"Oh, sir! I—I beg your pardon. I had no idea any one was here."

He came forward smiling; Janet had sat down again in her surprise.

"And though I am here, why should you beg my pardon, Miss Carey?"

"For singing before you. I did not know—I am very sorry."

"Perhaps you fancy I don't like singing?"

"Mine is such poor singing, sir. And the songs are so old. I can't play: I often only play to them with one hand."

"The singing is so poor—and the songs are so old, that I was going to ask of you—to beg of you—to sing one of them again for me."

She stood glancing up at him with her nice eyes, as shy as could be, uncertain whether he was mocking her.

"Do you know, Miss Carey, that I never ask a young lady for a

song now. I don't care to hear the new songs, they are so poor and frivolous: the old ones are worth a king's ransom. *Won't* you oblige me?"

"What shall I sing?"

"The one you have just sung. 'Blow, blow, thou wintry wind.'"

He drew a chair close, and listened: and seemed lost in thought when it was over. Janet could not conveniently get up without pushing the stool against him, and so sat in silence.

"My mother used to sing that song," he said, looking up. "I can recall her every note as well as though I had heard her yesterday. 'As friends remembering not!' Ay: it's a harsh world—and it grows more harsh and selfish day by day. I don't think it treats *you* any too well, Miss Carey."

"Me, sir?"

"Who remembers you?"

"Not many people. But I have never had any friends to speak of."

"Will you give me another song? The one I heard Mina ask you for—'Pray, Goody.' My mother used to sing that also."

"I don't know whether I must stay, sir. The children will be getting into mischief."

"Never mind the children. I'll take the responsibility."

Janet sung the song. Before it was finished the flock came in again. Dicky had tried to pull the magpie's feathers out, so James had let it fly.

After this evening, it somehow happened that Dr. Knox often came home early, although his throat was well again. He liked to make Miss Carey sing: and to talk to her; and to linger in the garden with her and the children in the twilight. Mrs. Knox was rarely at home, and had no idea how sociable her step-son was becoming. Lefford and its neighborhood followed the unfashionable custom of giving early soirées: tea at six, supper at nine, at home by eleven. James used to go for his mistress; on dark nights he took a lighted lantern. Mrs. Knox would arrive at home, her gown well pinned up, and innocent of any treasonable lingerings out of doors or in. It was beyond Janet's power to get Mina and Lotty to bed one minute before they chose to go: though her orders from Mrs. Knox on the point were strict. As soon as their mother's step was heard they would make a rush for the stairs. Janet had to follow them, as that formed part of her duty: and by the time Mrs. Knox was in-doors, the rooms were free, and Arnold was shut up in his study with his medical books and a skeleton.

For any treason that met the eye or the ear, Mrs. Knox might have assisted at all the interviews. The children might have repeated every word said to one another by the doctor and Janet, and welcome. The talk was all legitimate: of their own individual, ordinary interests, perhaps; of their lost parents; their past lives; the present daily doings; or, as the Vicar of Wakefield has it, of pictures, taste, Shakespeare, and the musical glasses. Dr. Knox never said such a thing to her as, Miss, I am in love with you; Janet was the essence of respectful shyness and called him Sir.

One evening something or other caused one of the soirées to break

up midway, and Mrs. Knox came home by twilight in her pink gauze gown. Instead of ringing at the front door, she came round the garden to the lawn, knowing quite well the elder children were not gone to bed, and would probably be in the garden-room. Very softly went she, intending to surprise them. The moon shone full on the glass doors.

The doors were shut. And she could see no children. Only Janet Carey sitting at the piano, and Dr. Knox sitting close by her, his eyes resting on her face, and an unmistakable look of—say friendship—in them. Mrs. Knox took in the whole scene by the light of the one candle standing on the table.

She let go the pink skirt and burst open the doors with a bang; Imagination is apt to conjure up skeletons of the future; a whole army of skeletons rushed into hers, any one of them ten times more ugly than that real skeleton in the doctor's study. A vision of his marrying Janet and taking possession of the house, and wanting all his money for himself instead of paying the family bills with it, was the worst.

Before a great and real dread, passion has to be silent. Mrs. Knox felt that she should very much like to buffet both of them with hands and tongue: but policy restrained her.

"Where are the children?" she began, as snappish as a fox; but that was only usual.

Janet had turned round on the music-stool; her meek hands dropping on her lap, her face turning all the colors of the rainbow. Dr. Knox just sat back in his chair and carelessly hummed to himself the tune Janet had been singing.

"Mina and Lotty are at Mrs. Hampshire's, ma'am," answered Janet. 'She came to fetch them just after you left, and said I might send in for them at half-past nine. The little ones are in bed."

"Oh," said Mrs. Knox. "It's rather early for you to be at home; is it not, Arnold?"

"Not particularly, I think. My time for coming home is always uncertain, you know."

He rose, and went to his room as he spoke. Janet got out the basket of stockings; and Mrs. Knox sat buried in a brown study.

After this evening things grew bad for Miss Carey. Mrs. Knox watched. She noticed her step-son's manner to Janet, and saw that he liked her ever so much more than was expedient. What to do, or how to stop it, she did not know, and was at her wits' end. To begin with, there was nothing to stop. Had she put together a whole week's looks and words of Arnold's, directed to Janet, she could not have squeezed one decent iota of complaint out of the lot. Neither dared she risk offending Arnold. What with the perpetual soirées out, and the general daily improvidence at home, Mrs. Knox was never in funds, and Arnold found oceans of household bills coming in to him. Tradesmen were beginning, as a rule now, to address their accounts to Dr. Knox. Arnold paid them; he was good-natured, and sensitively averse to complaining to his step-mother; but he thought it was hardly fair. What on earth she did with her income he could not imagine: rather than live in this

chronic state of begging, she might have laid down the pony-carriage.

Not being able to attack the doctor, Mrs. Knox vented all her venom on Miss Carey. Janet was the dray horse of the family, and therefore could not be turned away: she was too useful to Mrs. Knox to be parted with. Real venom it was; and hard to be borne. Her work grew harder, and she was snubbed from morning till night. The children's insolence to her was not reproved; Mina took to order her about. Weary and heart-sick grew she: her life was no better than Cinderella's: the only ray of comfort in it being the rare snatches of intercourse with Dr. Knox. He was like a true friend to her, and ever kind. He might have been kinder had he known what sort of a life she really led. But Mrs. Knox was a diplomatist, and the young fry did not dare to worry people very much, or to call names before their big brother Arnold.

II.

"HAS Dr. Knox come in, Mr. Dockett?"

Mr. Dockett, lounging over the counter to tease the dog, brought himself straight with a jerk, and faced his master, Mr. Tamlyn.

"Not yet, sir."

"When he comes in, ask him if he'll be so kind as step to me in the dining-room."

Mr. Tamlyn shut the surgery door, and the apprentice whistled to the dog, which had made its escape. Presently Dr. Knox came across the court-yard and received the message.

"Mr. Tamlyn wants you, sir, please. He is in the dining-room."

"Have you nothing to do, Dockett? Just set on and clean those scales."

The dining-room looked out on the garden and on the playing fountains. It was one of the prettiest rooms in Lefford; with white-and-gold papered walls, and mirrors, and a new carpet. Mr. Tamlyn liked to have things nice at home, and screwed the money out of the capital put by for Bertie. He sat at the table before some account books.

"Sit down, Arnold," he said, taking off his spectacles. "I have some news for you: I hope it won't put you out too much."

It did put out Dr. Knox very considerably, and it surprised him even more. For some time past now he had been cherishing a private expectation that Mr. Tamlyn would be taking him into partnership, giving him probably a small share only at first. Of all things it seemed the most likely to Dr. Knox: and, wanting in self-assertion though he was, it seemed to him that it would be a *right* thing to do. Mr. Tamlyn had no one to succeed him: and all the best part of his practice was formerly Mr. Knox's. Had Arnold only been a little older when his father died, he should have succeeded to it himself: there would have been little chance of Mr. Tamlyn's getting any of it. In justice, then, if Mr. Tamlyn now, or later, took a partner at all, it ought to be Arnold. But for looking forward to this, Dr. Knox had never stayed on all this while at the paltry salary paid him, and worked himself nearly to a skeleton. As old Tamlyn

talked, he listened as one in a bewildered dream, and he learned that his own day-dream was over.

Old Tamlyn was about to take a partner: some gentleman from London, a Mr. Shuttleworth. Mr. Shuttleworth was seeking a country practice, and would bring in three thousand pounds. Arnold's services would only be required to the end of the year, as Mr. Shuttleworth would join on the first of January.

"There'll not be room for three of us, Arnold—and Dockett will be coming on," said Mr. Tamlyn. "Besides, at your age, and with your talents, you ought to be doing something better for yourself. Don't you see that you ought?"

"I have seen it for some time. But—the truth is," added Arnold, "though I hardly like to own to it now, I have been cherishing a hpoe of this kind for myself. I thought, Mr. Tamlyn, you might some time offer it to me."

"And so I would, Arnold, and there's no one I should like to take as partner half so well as yourself, but that you have not the necessary money," said the surgeon, with eagerness. "I see what you are thinking, Arnold—that I might have taken you without a premium: but I must think of my poor boy. Shuttleworth brings in three thousand. I would have taken two with you."

"I could not bring in two hundred, let alone two thousand," said Dr. Knox.

"There's where it is. To tell you the truth, Arnold, I am getting tired of work; don't seem so much up to it as I was. Whoever comes in will have to do more even than you have done, and of course will expect to take at least a half share of the yearly profits. I should not put by much then: I could not alter my style of living, you know, or put down the carriages and horses, or anything of that sort: and I must save for poor Bertie. A sum of three thousand pounds means three thousand to me."

"Are the arrangements fully made?" asked Dr. Knox.

"Yes. Mr. Shuttleworth came down to Lefford yesterday, and has been going into the books with me this morning. And, by the way, Arnold, I hope you will meet him here at dinner to-night. I should not a bit wonder, either, but he might tell you of some opening for yourself: he seems to know most of the chief medical men in London. He is selling a good practice of his own. It is his health that obliges him to come to the country."

"I hope you will suit one another," said Dr. Kaox, for he knew that it was not everybody who could get on with fidgety old Tamlyn.

"We are to give it a six months' trial," said Tamlyn. "He would not bind himself without that. At the end of the six months, if both parties are not satisfied, we cancel the agreement: he withdraws his money, and I am at liberty to take a fresh partner. For that half year's services he will receive his half share of profits: which of course is only fair. You see I tell you all, Arnold."

Dr. Knox dined with them, and found the new man a very pleasant fellow, but quite as old as Tamlyn. He could not help wondering how he would relish the parish work, and said so in a whisper to Mr. Tamlyn while Shuttleworth was talking to Bertie.

"Oh, he thinks it will be exercise for him," replied the surgeon. "And Dockett will be coming on, you know."

It was a dark night, the beginning of November, wet and splashy. Mrs. Knox had a soirée at Rose Villa; and when the doctor reached home he met the company coming forth with cloaks and lanterns and clogs.

"Oh, it's you, Arnold, is it!" cried Mrs. Knox. "Could you not have come home for my evening? Two of the whist-tables had to play dummy; we had some disappointments."

"I stayed to dine with Mr. Tamlyn," said Arnold.

Sitting together over the fire, he and she alone, Mrs. Knox asked him whether he would not give her a hundred pounds a year for his board, instead of seventy-five. Which was uncommonly cool, considering what he paid for her besides in housekeeping bills. Upon which, Arnold told her he should not be with her beyond the close of the year; he was going to leave Lefford. For a minute it struck her dumb.

"Good heavens, Arnold, how am I to keep the house on without your help? I must say you have no consideration. Leave Lefford!"

"Mr. Tamlyn has given me notice," replied Arnold. "He is taking a partner."

"But—I just ask you—how am I to pay my way?"

"It seems to me that your income is quite sufficient for that, mother. If not—perhaps—if I may suggest it—you might put down the pony chaise."

Mrs. Knox shrieked out that he was a cruel man. Arnold, who never cared to stand scenes, lighted his candle and went up to bed.

Shuttleworth had taken rather a fancy to Dr. Knox; perhaps he remembered, too, that he was turning him adrift. Anyway, he bestirred himself and got him appointed to a medical post in London, where Arnold would receive two hundred pounds a year, and his board.

"I presume you know that I am about to run away, Miss Carey," said Dr. Knox, hastening up to join her one Sunday evening when they were coming out of church at Lefford.

"As if everybody did not know that!" cried Mina. "Where's mamma, Arnold? and Lotty?"

"They are behind, talking to the Parkers."

The Parkers were great friends of Mina's, so she ran back. The doctor and Janet walked slowly on.

"You will be glad to leave, sir," said Janet, in her humble fashion. "Things have not been very comfortable for you at home—and I hear you are taking a much better post."

"I shall be sorry to leave for one thing—that is, because I fear things may be more uncomfortable for you," he spoke out bravely. "What Rose Villa will be when all restraint is taken off the children, and with other undesirable things, I don't like to imagine."

"I shall do very well, sir," said Janet, meekly.

"I wonder you put up with it," he exclaimed. "You might be ten thousand times better and happier elsewhere."

"But I fear to change; I have no one to recommend me or to look out for me, you know."

"There's that lady I've heard you speak of—your aunt, Miss Cattledon."

"I could not think of troubling her. My mother's family do

not care to take much notice of me. They thought my father was not my mother's equal in point of family, and when she married him they turned her off, as it were. No, sir, I have only myself to look to."

"A great many of us are in the same case," he said. "Myself, for instance. I have been indulging I don't know what day-dreams for some time past; one of them that Mr. Tamlyn would give me a share in his practice; and—and there were others to follow in due course. Vain dreams all, and knocked on the head now."

"You will be sure to get on," said Janet.

"Do you think so?" he asked very softly, looking down into Janet's nice eyes by the gaslight in the road.

"At least, sir, I hope you will."

"Well, I shall try for it."

"Arnold!—come back, Arnold; I want you to give me your arm up the hill," called out Mrs. Knox.

Dr. Knox had to enter on his new situation at quarter day, the twenty-fifth of December; so he went up to London on Christmas Eve. Which was no end of a blow to old Tamlyn, as it left all the work on his own shoulders for a week.

III.

From two to three months passed on. One windy March day Mrs Knox sat alone in the garden-room, worrying over her money matters. The table, drawn near the fire, was strewed with bills and tradesmen's books; the sun shone on the closed glass doors.

Mrs. Knox's affairs had been getting into an extremely hopeless condition. It seemed, by the accumulation of present debts, that Arnold's money must have paid for everything. Her own income, which came in quarterly, appeared to dwindle away, she knew not how or where. A piteous appeal had gone up a week ago to Arnold, saying she should be in prison unless he assisted her, for the creditors were threatening to take steps. Arnold's answer, delivered this morning, was a fifty-pound note inclosed in a very plain letter. It had inconvenienced him to send the money, he said, and he begged her fully to understand that it was the *last* he should ever send.

So there sat Mrs. Knox before the table in an old dressing-gown, and her black hair more disheveled than a mop. The bills, oceans of them, and the fifty-pound bank-note lay in a heap together. Master Dicky had been cutting animals out of a picture-book, leaving the scraps on the cloth and the old carpet. Lotty had distributed there a few sets of dolls' clothes. Gerty had been tearing up a newspaper for a kite's tail. The fifty pounds would pay about a third of the debts, and Mrs. Knox was trying to apportion a sum to each of them accordingly.

It bothered her finely, for she was no accountant. She could manage to add up without making very many mistakes; but when it came to subtraction, her brain got into a hopeless maze. Janet might have done it, but Mrs. Knox was furious with Janet and would not ask her. Ill-treated, overworked Janet had plucked

up courage to give notice, and was looking out for a situation in Lefford. Just now, Janet was in the kitchen, ironing Dick's frilled collars.

"Take fifty-three from fourteen, and how much *does* remain?" groaned Mrs. Knox over the shillings. At that moment there was a sound of carriage-wheels, and a tremendous ring at the door. Sally darted in.

"Oh, ma'am, it's my Lady Jenkins! I knew her carriage at a distance. It have got red wheels!"

"Oh, my goodness!" cried Mrs. Knox, starting up. "Don't open the door yet, Sally; let me get upstairs first. Her ladyship's come to take me a drive, I suppose. Go and call Miss Carey—or stay, I'll go to her."

Mrs. Knox opened one of the glass doors, and whisked round to the kitchen. She bade Janet leave the ironing and go to do her books and bills, hastily explaining that she wanted to know how far fifty pounds would go toward paying a fair proportion of each debt. Janet was to make it all out in figures.

"Be sure take care of the note—I've left it somewhere," called back Mrs. Knox as she escaped to the stairs in hurry and confusion; for my Lady Jenkins's footman had hold of the bell and knocker, and was working both alarmingly.

Janet only half comprehended. She went round to the garden-room, shut the glass doors, and began upon the bills and books. But first of all, she looked out for the letters that were lying about, never supposing that the special charge had reference to anything else; at least, she said so afterward; and put them inside Mrs. Knox's desk. From first to last, then and later, Janet Carey maintained that she did not see any bank-note.

Mrs. Knox dressed herself with Sally's help, and went out with my Lady Jenkins—the ex-Mayor of Lefford's wife. The bills and the calculations made a long job, and Janet's mind was buried in it, when a startling disturbance suddenly arose in the garden; Dicky had climbed into the mulberry-tree and fallen out of it The girls came, dashing open the glass doors, saying he was *dead*. Janet ran out, herself nearly frightened to death.

Very true. If Dicky was not dead he looked like it. He lay white and cold under the tree, blood trickling down his face. James galloped off for Mr. Tamlyn. The two maids and Janet carried Dicky into the kitchen, and put him on the ironing-board with his head on an old cushion. That revived him; and when Mr. Shuttleworth arrived, for Tamlyn was out, Dicky was demanding bread and treacle. Shuttleworth put some diachylon plaster on his head, ordered him to bed, and told him not to get into trees again.

Their fears relieved, the maids had time to remember common affairs. Sally found all the sitting-room fires out, and hastened to light them. As soon as Janet could leave Dicky, who had persisted in going to bed in his boots, she went back to the accounts. Mrs. Knox came in before they were done. She blew up Janet for not being quicker, and when she had recovered the shock of Dicky's accident, she blew her up for that.

"Where's the note?" she snapped.

"What note, ma'am?" asked Janet.

"The bank-note. The bank-note for fifty pounds that I told you to take care of."

"I have not seen any bank-note" said Janet.

Well, that began the trouble. The bank-note was searched for, and there was neither sign nor symptom of it to be found. Mrs. Knox accused Janet Carey of stealing it, and called in a policeman. Mrs. Knox made her tale good to the man, representing Janet as a very black girl indeed; but the man said he could not take her into custody unless Mrs. Knox would charge her formally with the theft.

And that, Mrs. Knox hesitated to do. She told the policeman she would take until the morrow to consider of it. The whole of that evening, the whole of the night, the whole of the next morning till midday, Janet spent searching the garden-room. At midday the policeman appeared again, and Janet went into a sort of fit.

When Mr. Shuttleworth was sent for to her he said it was caused by fright, and that she had received a shock to the nervous system. For some days she was delirious, on and off; and when she could escape Sally's notice, who waited on her, they'd find her down in the garden-room, searching for the note, just as we afterward saw her searching for it in her sleep at Miss Deveen's. It chanced that the two rooms resembled each other remarkably: in their situation in the houses, in their shape and size and building arrangements, and in their opening by glass doors to the garden. Janet subsided into a sort of wasting fever; and Mrs. Knox thought it time to send for Miss Cattledon. The criminal proceedings might wait, she told Janet; like the heartless woman that she was! Not but that the loss of the money had thrown her flat on her beam-ends.

Miss Cattledon came. Janet solemnly declared, not only that she had not got the bank-note, but that she had never seen the note; never at all. Mrs. Knox said no one but Janet could have got it, and but for her illness, she would be already in prison. Miss Cattledon told Mrs. Knox she ought to be ashamed of herself for suspecting Janet Carey, and took Janet off by train to Miss Deveen's. Janet got there in a shivering fit, fully persuaded that the Lefford policemen were following her by the orders of Mrs. Knox.

And for the result of it all we must go on to the next paper

DR. KNOX.

SALLY.

MY DEAR ARNOLD,—Come down to Lefford without delay if you can: I want to see you particularly. I am in a peck of trouble.

"Ever your friend,

"RICHARD TAMLYN."

The above letter reached Dr. Knox in London one morning in April. He made it right with the authorities to whom he was subject, and reached Lefford the same afternoon.

Leaving his bag at the station, he went straight to Mr. Tamlyn's house; every other person he met halting to shake hands with him. Entering the iron gates, he looked up at the windows, but saw no one. The sun shone on the pillared portico, the drawing-room blinds beside it were down. Dr. Knox crossed the flagged court-yard, and passed off to enter by the route most familiar to him, the surgery, trodden by him so often in the days not long gone by. Mr. Dockett stood behind the counter, compounding medicines, with his coat-cuffs and wristbands turned up.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the young gentleman, dropping a bottle in his astonishment as he stared at Dr. Knox. "You are about the last person I should have expected to see, sir."

By which remark the doctor found that Mr. Tamlyn had not taken his apprentice into his confidence. "Are you all well here?" he asked, shaking hands.

"All as jolly as circumstances will let us be," said Mr. Dockett. "Young Bertie has taken a turn for the worse."

"Has he? I am sorry to hear that. Is Mr. Tamlyn at home? If so, I'll go in and see him."

"Oh, he's at home," was the answer. "He has hardly stirred out of doors for a week, and Shuttleworth says he's done to death with the work."

Going in as readily as though he had not left the house for a day, Dr. Knox found Mr. Tamlyn in the dining-room: the pretty room that looked to the garden and the fountain. He was sitting by the fire, his hand rumpling his gray hair: a sure sign that he was in some bother or tribulation. In the not quite four months that had passed since Dr. Knox left him, he had changed considerably: his hair was grayer, his face thinner.

"Is it you, Arnold?—I am so glad. I thought you'd come if you could."

Dr. Knox drew a chair near the fire, and sat down. "Your letter

gave me concern," he said. "And what do you mean by talking about a peck of trouble?"

"A peck of trouble!" echoed Mr. Tamlyn. "I might have said a bushel. I might have said a ton. There's trouble on all sides, Arnold."

"Can I help you out of it in any way?"

"With some of it, I hope you can: it's why I sent for you. But not with all: not with the worst. Bertie's dying, Arnold."

"I hope not!"

"As truly as that we are here talking to one another, I believe him to be literally dying," repeated the surgeon solemnly, his eyes filling and his voice quivering with pain. "He has dropped asleep, and Bessy sent me out of the room: my sighs wake him, she says. I can't help sighing, Arnold: and sometimes the sigh ends with a groan, and I can't help that."

Dr. Knox didn't see his way clear to make much answer just here.

"I've detected the change in him for a month past; in my inward heart I felt sure he could not live. Do you know what your father used to say, Arnold? He always said that if Bertie lived over his sixteenth or seventeenth year, he'd do; but the battle would be just about that time. Heaven knows, I attached no importance to the opinion: I have hardly thought of it: but he was right, you see. Bertie would be seventeen next July, if he were to live."

"I'm sure I am very grieved to hear this—and to see your sorrow," spoke Arnold.

"He is *so* changed!" resumed Mr. Tamlyn, in a low voice. "You remember how irritable he was, poor fellow? — well, all that has gone, and he is like an angel. So afraid of giving trouble; so humble and considerate to every one! It was this change that first alarmed me."

"When did it come on?"

"Oh, weeks ago. Long before there was much change for the worse to be *seen* in him. Only this morning he held my hand, poor lad, and—" Mr. Tamlyn faltered, coughed, and then went on again more bravely. "He held my hand between his, Arnold, and said he thought God had forgiven him, and how happy it would all be when we met in Heaven. For a long while now not a day has passed but he has asked us to forgive him for his wicked tempers—that's his word for it, wicked—the servants, and all."

"Is he in much pain?"

"Not much now. He has been in a great deal at times. But it made no difference, pain or no pain, to his sweetness of temper. He will lie resigned and quiet, the drops pouring down his face with the agony, never an impatient word escaping him. One day I heard him tell Bessy that angels were around him, helping him to bear it. We may be sure, Arnold, when so extraordinary a change as that takes place in the temperament, the close of life is not far off."

"Very true—as an ordinary rule," acquiesced Dr. Knox. "And now, how can I help you in this trouble?"

"In this trouble?—not at all," returned Mr. Tamlyn, rousing himself, and speaking energetically, as if he meant to put the

thought behind him. "*This* trouble no earthly being can aid me in, Arnold; and I don't think there's anybody but yourself I'd speak to of it: it lies too deep, you see; it wrings the soul. I could die of this trouble: I only fret at the other."

"And what is the other?"

"Shuttleworth won't stay."

"Won't he?"

"Shuttleworth says the kind of practice is not what he has been accustomed to, and the work's too hard, and he does not care how soon he leaves it. And yet Dockett has come on surprisingly, and takes his share now. The fact is, Arnold, Shuttleworth is just as lazy as he can hang together: he'd like to treat a dozen rose-water patients a day, and go through life easily. My belief is, he means to do it."

"But that will scarcely bring grist to his mill, will it?" cried Dr. Knox.

"His mill doesn't want grist; there's the worst of it," said Tamlyn. "The man was not badly off when he came here: but since then his only brother must go and die, and Shuttleworth has come into all his money. A thousand a year, if it's a penny."

"Then, I certainly don't wonder at his wanting to give up the practice," returned the doctor, with a smile.

"That's not all," grumbled old Tamlyn. "He wants to take away Bessy."

"To take away Bessie!"

"The two have determined to make themselves into one, I believe. Bessy only hesitated because of leaving poor Bertie. That impediment will not be in her way long."

He sighed as he spoke. Dr. Knox did not yet see what he was wanted for: and asked again.

"I've been leading up to it," said Mr. Tamlyn. "You must come back to me, Arnold."

"On the same terms as before?" inquired the doctor after a pause.

"Nonsense. You'd say 'No,' off-hand, if I proposed *them*. In Shuttleworth's place."

"Of course, Mr. Tamlyn, I could not come—I would not come unless it were made worth my while. If it were, I should like it of all things."

"Yes, just so; that's what I mean. Don't you like your post in London?"

"I like it very well, indeed. And I have had no doubt that it will lead to something better. But, if I saw a fair prospect before me here, I would prefer to come back to Lefford."

"*That* shall be made fair enough. Things have changed with me, Arnold: and I shouldn't wonder but you will some time, perhaps not very far distant, have all my practice in your own hands. I feel to be getting old: spirits and health are alike broken."

"Nay, not old yet, Mr. Tamlyn. You may wait a good twenty years for that."

"Well, well, we'll talk further at another interview. My mind's at rest now, and that's a great thing. If you had refused, Arnold, I should have sold my practice for an old song and gone clean away: I never could have stood being associated with another stranger.

You are going up home, I conclude. Will you come in this evening?"

"Very well," said Dr. Knox, rising. "Can I go up and see Bertie?"

"Not now; I'd not have him awakened for the world; and I assure you the turning of a straw seems to do it. You shall see him this evening: he is always awake and restless then."

Calling for his bag at the station, Dr. Knox went on to Rose Villa. They were at tea. The children rose up with a shout: his step-mother looked as though she could not believe her eyesight.

"Why, Arnold! Have you come home to stay?"

"Only for a day or two," he answered. "I thought I should surprise you, but I had not time to write."

Shaking hands with her, kissing the children, he turned to some one else, who was seated at the tea-table and had not stirred. His hand was already out, when she turned her head, and he drew his hand and himself back together.

"Miss Mack, my new governess," spoke Mrs. Knox.

"I beg your pardon," said Dr. Knox to Miss Mack, who turned out to be a young person in green, with stout legs and slippers down at heel. "I thought it was Miss Carey," he added to his step-mother. "Where is Miss Carey?"

Which of the company, Miss Mack excepted, talked the fastest, and which the loudest, could not have been decided though a thousand-pound wager rested on it. It was a dreadful tale to tell. Janet Carey had turned out to be a thief; Janet Carey had gone out of her mind nearly with fever and fear when she knew she was to be taken to prison and tried: tried for stealing the money; and Janet's aunt had come down and carried her away out of the reach of the policemen. Dr. Knox gazed and listened, and felt his blood turning cold with righteous horror.

"Be silent," he sternly said. "There must have been some strange mistake. Miss Carey was good and upright as the day"

."She stole my fifty pounds," said Mrs. Knox.

"*What!*"

"She stole my fifty-pound note. It was the one you sent me, Arnold."

His face reddened a little. "That note? Well, I do not know the circumstances that led you to accuse Miss Carey, but I know they were mistaken ones. I will answer for Janet Carey with my life."

"She took that note; it could not have gone in any other manner," steadily persisted Mrs. Knox. "You'll say so yourself, Arnold, when you know all. The commotion it has caused in the place, and the worry it has caused me, are beyond everything. Every day some tradesman or other comes here to ask whether the money has been replaced—for of course they know I can't pay them under such a loss, until it is; and I must say they have behaved very well. I never liked Janet Carey. Deceitful minx!"

With so many talking together, Dr. Knox did not gather a very clear account of the details. Mrs. Knox mixed up surmises with facts, in a manner to render the whole incomprehensible. He said

no more then. Later, Mrs. Knox saw that he was preparing to go out. She resented it.

"I think, Arnold, you might have passed this one evening at home: I want to have a talk with you about money matters. What I am to do is more than I know, unless Janet Carey or her friends can be made to return the money."

"I am going down to Tamlyn's, to see Bertie."

Dr. Knox let himself out at the street door, and was walking down the garden-path, when he found somebody come flying past. It was Sally the house-maid, on her way to open the gate for him. Such an act of attention was unusual and quite unnecessary; the doctor thanked her but told her she need not have taken the trouble.

"I—I thought I'd like to ask you, sir, how that—that poor Miss Carey is," said Sally, in a whisper, as she held the gate back, and her breath was so short as to hinder her words. "It was London she was took to, sir; and, as you live in the same town, I've wondered whether you might not have come across her."

"London is a large place," observed Dr. Knox. "I did not even know Miss Carey was there."

"It was a dreadful thing, sir, poor young lady. Everybody so harsh, too, over it. And I—I—I *can't* believe but she was innocent."

"It is simply an insult on Miss Carey to suppose otherwise," said Dr. Knox. "Are you well, Sally? What's the matter with your breath?"

"Oh, it's nothing but a stitch that takes me, thank you, sir," returned Sally, as she shut the gate after him and flew back again.

But Dr. Knox saw it was no "stitch" that had stopped Sally's breath and checked her utterance, but genuine agitation. It set him thinking.

No longer any sitting up for poor Bertie Tamlyn in this world! It was about eight o'clock when Dr. Knox entered the sick-chamber. Bertie lay in bed; his arms thrown outside the counterpane beside him, as though they were too warm. The fire gave out its heat; two lamps were burning, one on the mantel-piece, one on the drawers at the far end of the room. Bertie had always liked a great deal of light, and he liked it still. Miss Tamlyn met Dr. Knox at the door, and silently shook hands with him.

Bertie's wide-open eyes turned to look, and the doctor approached the bed; but he halted for one imperceptible moment in his course. When Mr. Tamlyn had said Bertie was dying, Arnold Knox had assumed it to mean, not that he was actually dying at that present time, but that he would not recover! But as he gazed at Bertie now in the bright light, he saw something in the face that his experienced medical eye could not mistake.

He took the wasted, fevered hand in his, and laid his soothing fingers on the damp brow. Miss Tamlyn went away for a minute's respite from the sick-room.

"Bertie, my boy!"

"Why didn't you come before, Arnold?" was the low, weak answer; and the breath was labored and the voice down nowhere. "I

have wanted you. Aunt Bessy would not write; and papa thought you would not care to come down from London just for me."

"But I would, Bertie—had I known you were as ill as this."

Bertie's hands were restless. The white quilt had knots in it as big as peas, and he was picking at them. Dr. Knox sat down by the low bed.

"Do you think I am dying?" suddenly asked Bertie.

It took the doctor by surprise. One does not always know how to answer such home questions.

"I'll tell you more about it when I've seen you by daylight, Bertie. Are you in any pain?"

"Not a bit now: that's gone. But I'm weak, and I can't stir about in bed, and—and—they all look at me so. This morning papa and Shuttleworth brought in Dr. Green. Any way, you must know that I shall not get to be as well as I used to be."

"What with one ailment and another, with care, and pain, and sorrow, and wrong, it seems to me, Bertie, that very few of us are well for long together. There's always something in this world: it is only when we go to the next that we can hope for rest and peace."

Bertie lifted his restless hands and caught one of Dr. Knox's between them. He had a yearning, imploring look that quite pained the doctor.

"I want you to forgive me, Arnold," he said, the tears running down. "When I remember how wicked I was, my heart just faints with shame. Calling all of you hideous names!—returning bitter words for kind ones. When we are going to die the past comes back to us. Such a little while it seems to have been now, Arnold! Why, if I had endured ten times as much pain, it would be over now. You were all so gentle and patient with me, and I never cared what trouble I gave, or what ill words I returned. And now the time is gone! Arnold, I want you to forgive me."

"My dear boy, there's nothing to forgive. If you think there is, why then I forgive you with all my heart."

"Will God ever forgive me, do you think?"

"Oh, my boy, yes," said the doctor, in a husky tone. "If we, poor sinful mortals, can forgive one another, how much more readily will He forgive—the good Father in Heaven of us all!"

Bertie sighed. "It would have been so easy for me to have tried for a little patience! Instead of that, I took pleasure in being cross and obstinate and wicked! If the time would but come over again! Arnold, do you think we shall be able to do one another good in the next world?—or will the opportunity be lost with this?"

"Ah, Bertie, I can not tell," said Dr. Knox. "Sometimes I think that just because so few of us make use of our opportunities here, God will, perhaps, give us a chance once again. I have not been at very many death beds yet, but of some of those the recollection of opportunities wasted has made the chief sting. It is only when life is closing that we see what we might have been, what we might have done."

"Perhaps He'll remember what my pain has been, Arnold, and how hard it was to bear. I was not like other boys. They can run, and climb, and leap, and ride on horseback, and do anything.

When I've gone out, it has been in a hand-carriage, you know; and I've had to lie and lie on the sofa, and just look up at the blue sky, or on the street that tired me so: or else in bed, where it was worse, and always hot. I hope He will recollect how hard it was for me."

"He saw how hard it was for you at the time, Bertie; saw it always."

"And Jesus Christ forgave all who went to Him, you know, Arnold; every one; just for the asking."

"Why, yes, of course He did. As He does now."

Mr. Tamlyn came into the room presently: he had been out to a patient. Seeing that Bertie was half asleep, he and Dr. Knox stood talking together on the hearth-rug.

"What's that?" cried the surgeon, suddenly catching sight of the movement of the restless fingers picking at the counterpane.

Dr. Knox did not answer.

"A trick he always had," said the surgeon, breaking the silence, and trying to make believe to cheat himself still. "The maids say he wears out all his quilts."

Bertie opened his eyes. "Is that you, papa? Is tea over?"

"Why yes, my boy; two or three hours ago," said the father, going forward. "Why? Do you wish for some tea?"

"Oh, I—I thought Arnold would have liked some."

He closed his eyes again directly. Dr Knox took leave in silence, promising to be there again in the morning. As he was passing the dining-room down-stairs, he saw Mr. Shuttleworth, who had just looked in. They shook hands, began to chat, and Dr. Knox sat down.

"I hear you do not like Lefford," he said.

"I don't dislike Lefford: it's a pretty and healthy place," was Mr. Shuttleworth's answer. "What I dislike is my position in it as Tamlyn's partner. The practice won't do for me."

"A doubt lay on my mind whether it would suit you when you came down to make the engagement," said Dr. Knox. "Parish work is not to every one's taste. And there's a great deal of practice besides. But the returns from that must be good."

"I'd not stay in it if it were worth a million a year," cried Mr. Shuttleworth. "Dockett takes the parish; I make him; but he is not up to much yet, and of course I feel that I am responsible. As to the town practice, why I assure you nearly all of it has lain on me. Tamlyn, poor fellow, can think of nothing but his boy."

"He will not have him here long to think of, I fear."

"Not very long; no. I hear, doctor, he is going to offer a partnership to you."

"He has said something about it. I shall take it if he does. Lefford is my native place, and I would rather live here than anywhere. Besides, I don't mind work," he added with a smile.

"Ah, you are younger than I am. But I'd advise you, as I have advised Tamlyn, to give up the parish. For goodness' sake do, Knox. Tamlyn says that at one time he had not much else *but* the parish, but it's different now. Your father had all the good practice then."

"Shall you set up elsewhere?"

"Not at present," said Mr. Shuttleworth. "We—I—perhaps

you have heard, though—that I and Bessy are going to make a match of it? We shall travel for a few months, or so, and then come home and pitch our tent in some pleasant sea-side place. If a little easy practice drops into me there, well and good: if not, we can do without it. Stay and smoke a cigar with me?"

Arnold looked at his watch, and sat down again. He wanted to ask Mr. Shuttleworth about Miss Carey's illness.

"The cause of her illness was the loss of that bank-note," said the surgeon. "They accused her of stealing it, and wanted to give her into custody. A little more, and she'd have had brain-fever. She was a timid, inexperienced girl, and the fright gave her system a shock."

"Miss Carey would no more steal a bank-note than you or I would steal one, Mr. Shuttleworth."

"Not she. I told Mrs. Knox so: but she scoffed at me."

"That Miss Carey is innocent as the day, that she is an upright, gentle, Christian girl, I will stake my life upon," said Dr. Knox. "How the note can have gone is another matter."

"Are you at all interested in finding it?" questioned Mr. Shuttleworth.

"Certainly I am. Every one ought to be, I think."

The surgeon took his cigar from his mouth. "I'll tell you my opinion, if you care to know it," he said. "The note was burned."

"Burned!"

"Well, it is the most likely solution of the matter that I can come to. Either burned, or else was blown away."

"But why do you say this?" questioned Dr. Knox.

"It was a particularly windy day. The glass doors of the room were left open while the house ran about in a fright, attending to the child, young Dick. A flimsy bit of bank paper, lying on the table, would get blown about like a feather in a gale. Whether it got into the fire, caught by the current of the chimney, or whether it sailed out of doors and disappeared in the air, is a question I can't undertake to solve. Rely upon it, Knox, it was one of the two: and I should bet upon the fire."

It was just the clew Dr. Knox had been wishing for. But he did not think the whole fault lay with the wind: he had another idea.

Lefford had a shock in the morning. Bertie Tamlyn was dead. The news came to Dr. Knox in a note from Mr. Tamlyn, which was delivered while he was dressing. "You will stay for the funeral, Arnold," were the concluding words. And as Dr. Knox wanted to be at home a little longer on his own account, he wrote to London to say that business was temporarily detaining him. He then went to see what he could do for Mr. Tamlyn, and got back to Rose Villa for dinner.

Watching for an opportunity—which did not occur until late in the afternoon—Dr. Knox startled the servants by walking into the kitchen, and sitting down. Mrs. Knox had gone off in the pony-chaise; the children were out with the new governess. The kitchen and the servants were alike smartened up for the rest of the day. Eliza, the cook, was making a new pudding-cloth; Sally was ironing.

"I wish to ask you both a few questions," said Dr. Knox, tak-

ing out his note-book and pencil. "It is not possible that Miss Carey can be allowed to lie under the disgraceful accusation that was brought against her, and I am about to try and discover what became of the bank-note. Mrs. Knox was not in the house at the time, and therefore can not give me the details."

Eliza, who had risen and stood, work in hand, simply stared at the doctor in surprise. Sally dropped her iron on the blanket.

"*We* didn't take the note, sir," said Eliza, after a pause. "We'd not do such a thing."

"I'm sure I didn't; I'd burn my hands off first," broke in Sally, with a burst of tears.

"Of course you would not," returned Dr. Knox in a pleasant tone. "The children would not. Mrs. Knox would not. But as the note undoubtedly disappeared, and without hands, we must try and discover where the mystery lies and how it went. I dare say you would like Miss Carey to be cleared."

"Miss Carey was a downright nice young lady," pronounced the cook. "Quite another sort from this one we've got now."

"Well, give me all the particulars as correctly as you can remember," said the doctor. "We may get some notion or other out of them."

Eliza plunged into the narration. She was fond of talking. Sally stood over her ironing, sniffing and sighing. Dr. Knox listened.

"Mrs. Knox left the note on the table—which was much strewed with papers—when she went out with Lady Jenkins, and Miss Carey took her place at the accounts," repeated Dr. Knox, summing up the profuse history in a few concise words. "While—"

"And Miss Carey declared, sir, that she never saw the note; never noticed it lying there at all," came Eliza's interruption.

"Yes, just so. While Miss Carey was at the table, the alarm came that Master Dick had fallen out of the tree, and she ran to him—"

"And a fine fright that fall put us into, sir! We thought he was dead. Jim went galloping off for the doctor, and me and Sally and Miss Carey stayed bathing his head on that there very ironing-board, a-trying to find out what the damage was."

"And the children; where were they?"

"All round us here in the kitchen, sir, sobbing and staring."

"Meanwhile the garden-room was deserted. Nobody went into it, as far as you know."

"Nobody at all, sir. When Sally ran in to look at the fire, she found it had gone clean out. The doctor had been there then, and Master Richard was in bed. A fine pickle Sally found the room in, with the scraps of paper, and that, blown about the floor. The glass doors was standing stark staring open to the wind."

"And, I presume, you gathered up some of these scraps of paper, and lighted the fire with them, Sally?

Dr. Knox did not appear to look at Sally as he spoke, but he saw and noted every movement. He saw that her hand shook so that she could scarcely hold the iron.

"Has it never struck you, Sally, that you might have put the bank-note into the grate with these scraps of paper, and burned it?" he continued. "Innocently, of course. That is how I think the

note must have disappeared. Had the wind taken it into the garden, it would most probably have been found."

Sally flung her apron over her face, and herself on a chair, and burst into a howl. Eliza looked at her.

"If you think there is a probability that this was the case, Sally, you must say so," continued Dr. Knox. "You will never be blamed, except for not having spoken."

"'Twas only yesterday I asked Sally whether she didn't think this was the way it might have been," said the cook in a low tone to Dr. Knox. "She have seemed so put out, sir, for a week past."

"I vow to goodness that I never knew I did it," sobbed Sally. "All the while the bother was about, and Miss Carey, poor young lady, was off her head, it never once struck me. When Eliza and me thought was, that some tramps must have come round the side of the house and got in at the open glass doors and stole it. The night after Miss Carey left with her aunt, I was thinking about her as I lay in bed, and wondering whether the mistress would send the police after her or not, when all of a sudden the thought flashed across me that it might have gone into the fire with the other pieces of paper. Oh mercy, I wish I was somewhere!"

"What became of the ashes out of the grate?—the cinders?" asked Dr. Knox.

"They're all in the ash-place, sir, waiting till the garden's ready for them," sobbed Sally.

With as little delay as possible, Dr. Knox had the cinders carefully sifted and examined, when the traces of what had once undoubtedly been a bank-note were discovered. The greater portion of the note had been reduced to tinder, but a small part of it remained, enough to show what it had been and its number. It must have fallen out of the grate partly consumed, while the fire was lighting up, and been swept underneath by Sally with other remnants, where it had lain quietly until morning and been taken away with the ashes.

The traces gathered carefully into a small box and sealed up, Dr. Knox went into the presence of his step-mother.

"I think," he said, just showing the box as it lay in his hand, "that this proof will be accepted by the Bank of England; in that case they will make good the money to me. One question, mother, I wish to ask you: how could you possibly suspect Miss Carey?"

"There was no one else for me to suspect," replied Mrs. Knox in a fretful tone; for she did not at all like this turn in the affair.

"Did you *really* suspect her?"

"Why, of course I did. How can you ask such foolish questions?"

"It was a great mistake in any case to take it up as you did. I am not alluding to the suspicion now; but to your harsh and cruel treatment."

"Just mind your own business, Arnold. It's nothing to you."

"For my own part, I regard it as a matter that we must ever look back upon with shame."

"There, that's enough," said Mrs. Knox. "The thing is done with, and it can not be recalled. Janet Carey won't die of it."

Dr. Knox went about Lefford with the box in his hand, making

things right. He called in at the police station; he caused a minute account to be put in the "Lefford News;" he related the details to private friends. Not once did he allude to Janet Carey, or mention her name; it was as though he would proudly ignore the stigma cast on her and assume that the world did the same. The world did; but it gave some hard words to Mrs. Knox.

Mr. Tamlyn had not much sympathy for wonders of any kind just then. Poor Bertie, lying cold and still in the chamber above, took up all his thoughts and his grief. Arnold spent a good deal of time with him, and took his round of patients.

It was the night before the funeral, and they were sitting together at twilight in the dining-room. Dr. Knox was looking through the large window at the fountain in the middle of the grass-plot: Mr. Tamlyn had his face on his knees; he had not looked up for the last half hour.

"When is the very earliest time that you can come, Arnold?" he began abruptly.

"As soon as ever they will release me in London. Perhaps that will be in a month; perhaps not until the end of June, when the six months will be up."

Mr. Tamlyn groaned. "I want you at once, Arnold. You are all I have now."

"Shuttleworth must stay until I come."

"Shuttleworth's not you. You must live with me, Arnold?"

"Live with you?"

"Why of course you must. What am I to do in this large house by myself now *he* is gone? Bessy will be gone too. I couldn't stand it."

"It would be much more convenient for me to be here, as far as the practice is concerned," remarked Dr. Knox, after reflection.

"And more sociable. Do you never think of marriage, Arnold?"

Dr. Knox turned a little red. "It has been of no use for me to think of it hitherto, you know, sir."

"I wish you would. Some nice, steady girl, who would make things pleasant here for us in Bessy's place. There's room for a wife as well as for you, Arnold. Think of these empty rooms: nobody but you and me in them! And you know people like a married medical man better than a single one."

The doctor opened his lips to speak, but his courage failed him; he would leave it to the last thing before he left on the morrow, or else write from London. Tamlyn mistook his silence.

"You'll be well enough off to keep two wives, if the law allowed it, let alone one. From the day you join me, Arnold, half the profits shall be yours—I'll have the deed made out—and the whole practice at my death. I've nobody to save for, now Bertie's gone."

"He is better off; he is in happiness," said Dr. Knox, his voice a little husky.

"Ay. I try to let it console me. But I've nobody but you now, Arnold. And I don't suppose I shall forget you in my will. To confess the truth, the turning you away to make room for Shuttleworth has lain on my conscience."

When Arnold reached home that night, Mrs. Knox and her eldest daughter were alone; she reading, Mina dressing a doll. Lefford

was a place that went in for propriety, and nobody gave soirées while Bertie Tamlyn lay dead. Arnold told Mrs. Knox of the new arrangement.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "Coming back to Lefford! Well, I shall be glad to have you at home again," she added, thinking of the household bills.

"Mr. Tamlyn proposes that I shall live with him," said Dr. Knox.

"But you will never be so stupid as to do that?"

"I have promised to do it. It will be much more convenient."

Mrs. Knox looked sullen, and bit her lip. "How much of a share are you to have?"

"I go in as full partner."

"Oh, I am so glad!" cried out Miss Mina—for they all liked their good-natured brother. "Arnold, perhaps you'll go and get married now!"

"Perhaps I may," he answered.

Mrs. Knox dropped her book in the sudden fright. If Arnold married, he might want his house—and turn her out of it! He read the fear in her face.

"We may make some arrangement," said he quietly. "You shall still occupy it and pay me a small nominal rent—five pounds a year, say—which I shall probably return in toys for the children."

The thought of his marriage had always lain upon her with a thorny dread. "Who is the lady?" she asked.

"The lady? Oh, I can't tell you, I'm sure. I have not asked any one yet."

"Is that all?"

"Quite all—at present."

"I think," said Mrs. Knox slowly, as if deliberating the point with herself, and in the most affectionate of tones, "that you would be happier in a single life, Arnold. One never knows what a wife is till she's tried."

"Do you think so? Well, we must leave it to the future. What will be, will be."

And now I am taking up the story for myself; I, Johnny Ludlow. Had I gone straight on with it after that last night of Janet's sleep-walking at Miss Deveen's, you would never have understood.

It was on the Saturday night that Janet was found out—as anybody must remember who took the trouble to count up the nights and days. On the Sunday morning early, Miss Deveen's doctor was sent for. Dr. Galliard happened to be out of town, so Mr. Black attended for him. Cattledon was like vinegar. She looked upon Janet's proceedings as a regular scandal, and begged Miss Deveen's pardon for having brought her niece into the house. Upon which she was requested not to be silly.

Miss Deveen told the whole tale of the lost bank-note, to me and to Helen and Anna Whitney: at least, as much as she knew of it herself. Janet was innocent as a child; she felt sure of that, she said, and much to be pitied; and that Mrs. Knox, of Lefford, seemed to be a most undesirable kind of person. To us it sounded like a romance, or a story out of a newspaper police report.

Monday came in; a warm, bright April-day. I was returning to Oxford in the evening—and why I had not returned in the past week, as ought to have been the case, there's no space to tell of here. Miss Deveen said we might go for a walk if we liked. But Helen and Anna did not seem to care about it; neither did I, to say the truth. A house with a marvel in it has attractions; and we would by far rather have gone upstairs to see Janet. Janet was better, quite composed, but weak, they said: she was up and dressed, and in Miss Deveen's own blue-room.

"Well, do you mean to go out, or not, you young people?" asked Miss Deveen. "Dear me, here are visitors!"

George came in bringing a card. "Dr. Knox."

"Why! it must be some one from that woman at Lefford!" exclaimed Miss Deveen, in an undertone to me. "Oh, no; I remember now, Johnny; Dr. Knox was the step-son; *he* was away and had nothing to do with it. Show Dr. Knox in, George."

A tall man in black, whom one might have taken anywhere for a doctor, with a grave, nice face, came in. He said his visit was to Miss Carey, as he took the chair George placed near his mistress. Just a few words, and then we knew the whole, and saw a small sealed-up box in his hand, which contained the remains of the bank-note.

"I am more glad than though you brought Janet a purse of gold!" cried Miss Deveen, her eyes sparkling with pleasure. "Not that I think any one could have doubted her, Dr. Knox—not even your step-mother, in her heart—but it is satisfactory to have it cleared up. It has made Miss Carey very ill; but this will set her at rest."

"Your servant told me Miss Carey was ill," he said. "It was for her I asked."

With a face of concern, he listened to what Miss Deveen had to say of the illness. When she spoke of Janet's fright at seeing the policeman at the Colosseum, his brow went red and he bit his lips. Next came the sleep-walking: she told it all.

"Her brain and nerves must have been overstrained to an alarming degree," he observed, after a short silence. "Mr. Shuttleworth, who attended her at the time, spoke to me of the shock to the system. But I hoped she had recovered."

"She would never have recovered, Dr. Knox, so long as the dread lay upon her that she was to be criminally prosecuted: at least, that is my opinion," said Miss Deveen. "I believe the chief thing that ails her is *fright*. Not a knock at the door, not the marching past the house of a policeman, not the sudden entrance of a servant into the room, but has brought to her a shock of agonizing fear. It is a mercy that she has escaped brain fever. After all, she must possess a good constitution. The sight of that man from Lefford at the Colosseum did great mischief."

"It was unfortunate that he should happen to be there," said Dr. Knox: "and that the man should have dared to accost her with his insolence! But I shall inquire into it."

"What you have in that box will be the best medicine for her," said Miss Deveen. "It will speedily effect a cure—or call me an untrue prophet. Dear me! how strangely things come out!"

"May I be allowed to see Miss Carey?" asked Dr. Knox. "And to—to tell her the story of her clearance in my own way?"

Miss Deveen made no reply. She looked at Dr. Knox, and seemed to hesitate.

"I think it may be better for Miss Carey that I should, madam. For more reasons than one."

"And really I don't see why you should not," said Miss Deveen, heartily. "I hesitated because Mr. Black forbade the admission of strangers. But—perhaps you are not a stranger to her?"

"Oh, dear no: I and Miss Carey are old friends," he answered, a curious smile lighting up his face. "And I should also wish to see her in my medical capacity."

But the one to put in her word against this was Cattledon. She came down looking green, and protesting in Miss Deveen's ear that no male subject in Her Majesty's dominions, save and except Mr. Black, ought to be admitted to the blue-room. Janet had no full dress on; nothing but skirts and a shawl.

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Miss Deveen. "Why Dr. Knox might have seen her had she been in bed: he is a physician." And she took him up herself to the blue-room.

"Of all old maids that Cattledon's the worst!" nodded Helen Whitney.

Miss Deveen went in alone, leaving him outside the door. Janet sat in an arm-chair by the fire, muffled in an old brown shawl of Cattledon's.

"And how do you feel now, my dear?" said Miss Deveen, quietly. "Better, I see. And, oh, I have such pleasant news for you: an old friend of yours has called to see you; and I think—I think—he will be able to cure you sooner than Mr. Black. It is Dr. Knox, my dear: not of Lefford now, you know: of London."

She called the doctor in, and Janet's pale cheeks took a tint of crimson. Janet's face had never been big; but as he stood looking at her, her hand in his, he was shocked to see how small it had become. Miss Deveen shut the door upon them. She hoped with all her heart he was not going to spare that woman at Lefford.

"Janet, my dear," he said in a fatherly kind of way as he drew a chair near her and kept her hand, "when that trouble happened at home, how was it you did not write to me?"

"Write to *you!* Oh, sir, I could not do such a thing," answered Janet, beginning to tremble.

"But you might have known I should be your friend. You might also have known that I should have been able to clear you."

"I did once think of writing to you, Dr. Knox: just to tell you that I had not indeed touched the bank-note," faltered Janet. "As the money came from you, I should have liked to write so much. But I did not dare."

"And you preferred to suffer all these weeks of pain, and the fright brought upon you by Mrs. Knox—for which," said he deliberately, "I shall never forgive her—rather than drop me a few lines! You must never be so foolish again, Janet. I should have gone to Lefford at once and searched out the mystery of the note—and found it."

Janet moved her lips and shook her head, as much as to say that he could never have done that.

"But I have done it," said he. "I have been down to Lefford and found it all out, and have brought the bank-note up with me—what remains of it. Sally was the culprit."

"Sally!" gasped Janet, going from red to white.

"Sally—but not intentionally. She lighted the fire that afternoon with the note and some more scraps. The note fell out, only partly burned; and I am going to take it to the bank that they may exchange it for a whole one."

"And—will—they?" panted Janet.

"Of course they will; it is in the regular course of business that they should," affirmed Dr. Knox, deeming it best to be positive for her sake. "Now, Janet, if you are to tremble like this, I shall go away and send up Miss Cattledon—and she does not look as if she had a very amiable temper. Why, my dear child, you ought to be glad."

"Oh, so I am, so I am!" she said, breaking into sobs. "And—does everybody know at Lefford that I was innocent?"

"Nobody at Lefford believed you guilty. Of course, it is all known, and in the newspapers too—how Sally lighted the fire with a fifty-pound bank-note, and the remains were fished out of the ashes."

"Mrs. Knox—Mrs. Knox—" She could not go on for agitation.

"As to Mrs. Knox, I am not sure but we might prosecute her. Rely upon one thing, Janet: that she will not be very well welcomed at her beloved soirées for some long time to come."

Janet looked at the fire and thought. Dr. Knox kept silence, that she might recover herself after the news.

"I shall get well now," she said in a half whisper. "I shall soon"—turning to him—"be able to take another situation. Do you think Mrs. Knox will give me a recommendation?"

"Yes, that she will—when it's wanted," said he, with a queer smile.

She sat in silence again, a tinge of color in her face, and seeing fortunes in the fire. "Oh, the relief, the relief!" she murmured, slightly lifting her hands. "To feel that I may be at peace and fear nothing! I am very thankful to you, Dr. Knox, for all things."

"Do you know what I think would do you good?" said Dr. Knox suddenly. "A drive. The day is so fine, the air so balmy: I am sure it would strengthen you. Will you go?"

"If you please, sir. I do feel stronger, since you told me this."

He went down and spoke to Miss Deveen. She heartily agreed: anything that would benefit the poor girl, she said; and the carriage was coming round to the door, for she had been thinking of going out herself. Cattledon could not oppose them, for she had stepped over to the curate's.

"Would you very much mind—would you pardon me if I asked to be allowed to accompany her alone?" said Dr. Knox, hurriedly to Miss Deveen, as Janet was coming down-stairs on Lettice's arm, dressed for the drive.

Miss Deveen was taken by surprise. He spoke as though he were flurried, and she saw the red look on his face.

"I can take care of her as perhaps no one else could," he added with a smile. "And I—I want to ask her a question, Miss Deveen."

"I—think—I—understand you," she said, smiling back at him. "Well, you shall go. Miss Cattledon will talk of propriety, though, when she comes home, and be ready to snap us all up."

And Cattledon was. When she found Janet had been let go for a slow and easy drive, with no escort but Dr. Knox inside, and the fat coachman on the box, she conjectured that Miss Deveen must have taken leave of her senses. Cattledon took up her station at the window to wait for their return, firing out words of temper every other second.

The air must have done Janet good. She came in from the carriage on Dr. Knox's arm, her cheeks bright, her pretty eyes cast down, and looking quite another girl.

"Have you put your question, Dr. Knox?" asked Miss Deveen, meeting him in the hall, while Janet came on.

"Yes, and had it answered," he said brightly. "Thank you, dear Miss Deveen; I see we have your sympathies."

She just took his hand in hers and squeezed it. It was the first day she had seen him, but she liked his face.

Cattledon began upon Janet at once. If she felt well enough to start off on promiscuous drives, she must be well enough to see about a situation.

"I have been speaking to her of one, Miss Cattledon," said Dr. Knox, catching the words as he came in. "I think she will accept it."

"Where is it?" asked Cattledon.

"At Lefford."

"She shall never go back to Rose Villa with my consent, sir. And I think you ought to know better than to propose it to her."

"To Rose Villa! Certainly not: at least at present. Rose Villa will be hers, though; the only little settlement that can be made upon her."

The words struck Cattledon silent. But she could see through a brick wall.

"Perhaps *you* want her, young man?"

"Yes, I do. I should have wanted her before this, but that I had no home to offer her. I have one now; and good prospects too. Janet has had it all explained to her. Perhaps you will allow me to explain it to you, Miss Cattledon."

"I'm sure it's more than Janet Carey could have expected," said Cattledon, growing mollified as she listened. "She's a poor thing. I hope she will make a good wife!"

"I will risk it, Miss Cattledon."

"And she shall be married from my house," struck in Miss Deveen. "Johnny, if you young Oxford blades can get here for it, I will have you all to the wedding."

And we did get there for it: I, and Tod, and William Whitney. And saw the end, so far, of Janet Carey.

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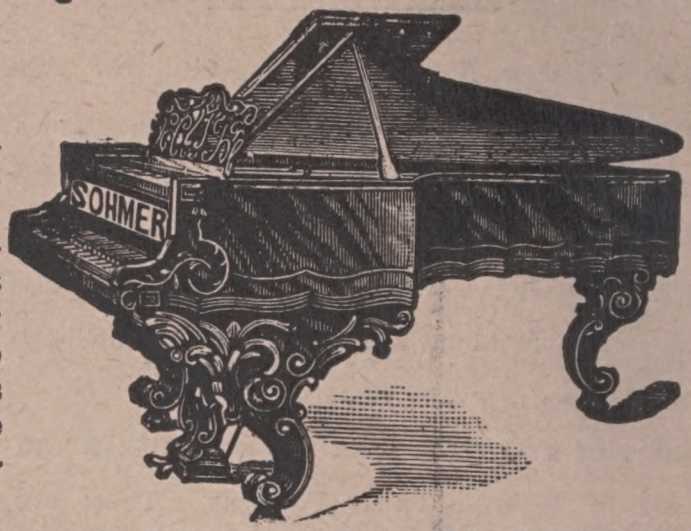

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